THE Hudson REVIEW

FRANK BUTLER:
The Watchers in the Dark—a story

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS:
Four Poems

ROBERT LOWELL:
William Carlos Williams

RICHMOND LATTIMORE:
Letter from Athens

PATRICK CRUTTWELL:
Romantics and Victorians

Poems by JAMES DICKEY, WILLIAM ARROWSMITH, ISABEL CASSERES, BYRON COLT, JOHN HAAG.

Articles and Reviews by BENJAMIN DE MOTT, DENIS DONOGHUE, B. H. HAGGIN, BERNARD KNOX, MARVIN MUDRICK, JOHN SIMON, LOUIS SIMPSON, VERNON YOUNG.

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FRANK BUTLER

The Watchers in the Dark

INTO THE COLD NIGHT Sally May stepped from the library of the Whitings' house onto the flagstones like a puff of milkweed somehow burst in winter from its pod, magically altering the season wherever she drifted in her delight. The chill moon hung in the maples for her like a picnic lantern and the December warmed to the zephyr in her heart. She stood shivering exquisitely upon the terrace and hugged herself as she rubbed her arms with her hands and thought about Steve. Sally May Campbell was eighteen. She was very blonde and very pretty. The jewels of love were streaming bright and burning in her veins.

The rescuers crowded the flowstone brink in the white glare of their carbide lamps and peered down through stumpy stalagmites into the impossible bell-shaped pit where Steve Whiting had fallen six hours before. The little arch of a room was heaped with equipment from the State Guard Armory at Sutter City, some of it useful. Except for Ralph Binkley, the tough thirteen-year-old who had kept vigil alone above the drop-off for the dark hours since Steve had fallen, all had just arrived, with the doctor. The circumstance was worse than any had feared. Even Pete Foster and Arch Gooding, who had witnessed the fall with Binkley and then raced from the cave to call the town for help, were freshly horrified by the great indifferent hole at their feet.

At the far edge of the terrace Sally May gazed back at the Whiting mansion. Only the parlor where Mrs. Whiting was reading was lit. She could make out the windows of Steve's second-story room beyond the last of the six gleaming columns across the front.

The Whitings' house was larger than her home near Richmond but very little older than she, and though it did not look it, modern—suburban. Campbell Grove, however, had been built by slaves in 1855. Its portico was famous. It was in books. Since Sally May was an only child and her parents elderly, the 207-acre estate, which she knew to the square inch and to the nickel, would soon

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be hers. Mr. Whiting was a very successful criminal lawyer but his own people were from Cincinnati—not even Southerners—whereas the Campbells were landed Virginians—had owned orchards and timberland from the Tidewater to the Shenandoah Valley for generations. But she was sure her parents would like the Whitings. They were wonderful people, and everyone she had met that semester was pleasant and cultivated and wonderful, too. Nashville, in fact, had surprised her. She knew that this Christmas would be the happiest and gayest of her life.

As she stood in the chill sensuality of the dark and looked up at Steve's room, Sally May visualized the firm double bed she had crept into with him late these last two nights, his stained lab table with its clutter of instruments and papers and books and *Scientific Americans,* the three trophies grouped beneath the football clippings and pictures along one wall, and the heap of boots and fishing rods and caving gear always in the corner near the bathroom.

She stood, dreamily recalling them, one by one. It seemed then to Sally May that the world had been indeed created for this one moment of her extreme and special happiness, that all these millions of years it had been merely ripening to the fruit of this, her own empathic ecstasy for all that Steve was to her. And mostly, her momentary delight was through those facets—those interests, places, objects—by which she had symbolized him to herself. Their grand synthesis, Sally May imagined in the facile intensity of her ravenous young need, to be her own picture upon Steve's bureau. It was the one place in all that big corner room of his where everything was always very neat.

She reached within her jacket and fingered Steve's class ring, hung from her neck over her cashmere sweater by a thin gold chain which had belonged to her grandmother. Her love for him could never be so sweetly intense in quite the same way if he were there that moment to smile and talk his soft way with her, and kiss her too, if his parents were not around. Even their secret passion of sex was to her somehow a lesser thing than this private smoldering of hers.

She was glad that Steve explored caves and was captain of his football team and also first in his class. All that meant that he was The Best, and Sally May's pride in that knowledge was in reality

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half of her present happiness. The other half was the savored pain of his absence from her tonight. Alone on the terrace those cold delicious moments of the December night, Sally May stood in fiery communion with herself, giddy with the first liquors of feminine possessiveness.

Tennessee State Guard Captain Ernest Fetherworth stood. "Hold on there, Bud. I don't want to take no chances."

His helmet grazed the center of the chamber's dome. He was a big man, a quarry foreman, and he had had a hard time crawling through some of the passages. "Why, that racket might crash the whole cave down on us."

Up over him and a man's height above the drop-off Bud Pettibone leaned his sledgehammer against the wall of the ledge. He sat and waited for the reverberations to die. Then he called down, "A few more right smart ones ought to do it, Cap'n."

"It's a good wall and ceiling over the pit, Mr. Fetherworth," Arch Gooding argued. He had a bright, mild face composed of buck teeth, freckles, and pale blue eyes. "After that first ledge fell off on the far side I don't think nothing else can pull loose."

"Yeah," Pete Foster agreed. "We're mighty lucky we can use a sledge back here at all, ain't we, Arch boy?"

Pete was tow-headed, limited, and very likable. He grasped now for a link to Arch whenever he spoke, as a boy on a bicycle hitches a ride behind a truck. He could never maneuver beyond or even catch up to this event himself and he was frightened of its size and speed—or its leaving him behind.

"Back in the tunnel going out, I mean," the Captain said. "One breakdown would block us up, as well as him. It's tolerable risky, boys."

"Taking chances—" A new voice. " 'Pears to me that's what we're a-doing and got to do, Ernie."

This was Leroy, a lean little man with sleepy eyes and a mouth full of horsey teeth which always seemed to be grinning, even when they were not. His hands were outsized, as massive as oak roots, but his fingers were as delicate as willow branches. He was a mechanic.

"These kids seem right sensible kids to me and they claim it's a strong enough passageway out there to the big rooms," he said.

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He looked up at the spike and studied it a moment, cracking his knuckles and pursing his full and mobile lips. "Now, the way I judge it, Ernie, is that we just got to get that spike up in there, that's all."

"I reckon. But—" Captain Fetherworth shouted up to the giant of a man above him, "wrap her up good this time, Pettibone! And make each lick count."

Captain Fetherworth glanced back at the little fellow for confirmation. "All I mean is we got to think things through proper, Leroy. —You see what I mean?" He was confidential.

Leroy looked up at his friend and nodded. As plainly as sweat, the Captain's blond meaty face wore his honest discomfort with the immense responsibility before him.

"Sure, Ernie, sure," he answered. "But we got to take *some* risks." He gazed hard into the pit. "This ain't no piece of pie no way you look at it."

Leroy had all along seemed more quietly disturbed than any of the State Guard men there. He was the only one of them who had at all known the boy upon whom all their attentions were fixed, like one great communal spotlight.

He gave the Captain a sharp punch on the arm, then held his eyes with his own, as he seemed to do with everyone when he talked.

"You just call the tricks, old buddy, and I'm right with you." He grinned more encouragement. "All of us are." Leroy's speech was tough and supple and very pleasant, like leather. "I'm right glad you're the man this time, Ernie."

Captain Fetherworth wondered just how Leroy had meant that. He never could tell about Leroy. He understood well enough that no one would really want to be running this show.

From out of her concentration and the dignified complaints of the fire, Mrs. Whiting glanced from her novel, somewhat startled, as the French doors shut with a soft rattle far across the room.

"Oh," she smiled with a gasp, "I didn't know you were on the terrace, Sally May."

"It's just *won*derful out there, Mrs. Whiting."

"And without a coat!" Mrs. Whiting laughed. "You children."

She placed an embroidered marker across the page and laid

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the book upon the slender end table beside the sofa. She was a small, lustrous woman, of lucid grace and sharp movements. "You must be freezing, dear. Come over and sit by the fire with me."

"It *was* cold, but delicious!"

Sally May smiled a very charming smile, Mrs. Whiting thought. She crossed the carpet on quick, light feet, unbuttoning her jacket as she came in a flurry of youth and whirl of tweeds, then stood before the fire, flushed and lovely and expensive.

"I'll just stand and soak it up for a while, thanks, Mrs. Whiting."

For her school and background, Sally May Campbell was a very colloquial young lady, Mrs. Whiting noted favorably. In time, that could aid her, especially since her inheritance of aristocracy was almost satirically apparent. Yet even with her brushed blonde hair, clear skin and high cheeks, her Stokes Belmont Academy manner and heirloom brooch, Sally May still had far to go toward being a lady.

"What were you doing out there, dear?—I mean," she elaborated, fearing to injure the sensitive ears of eighteen, "were you looking for anything—anything I might help you with, honey?"

"No, ma'am . . ." Sally May paused as she seated herself, feigning thought as youngsters do, Mrs. Whiting suspected while, as usual, registering her observation without judgment. "I was just out looking at your house in the moonlight . . . sort of thinking . . ." she trailed off dreamily.

Mrs. Whiting did not appear to consider Sally May's pose and proffer. Her answer was immediate.

But so was her reaction: according to the motion pictures Sally May probably had on her real mind, Mrs. Whiting understood that she was now supposed to ask, with soap opera throatiness, "You care for Stephen very much, don't you, Sally May?"

And that would suffice. Off they would be then, toward a swamp of facile and offensive emotions. Not because of the cliché, for Mrs. Whiting understood clichés to qualify among the lesser lubricants of life, but because such premature seriousness was not the manner in which she cared to discuss her son with Sally May, she chose the other path of talk, and also because she sensed that a leisured chat about her home, or Charleston, could better tell her what she wanted to know about this young girl, visiting Steve for the Christmas holidays, than would a conversation of searching

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questions and cautious answers which, until Sally May had appeared as a distinct personality to Mrs. Whiting, could have no meaning to her whatsoever.

"It's modelled on Colony Hall, my home in Charleston," she answered, in inflections which determined the theme and induced its precise mood. "Outside, it's almost an exact copy. But the parlor is the only room I've managed to make fairly authentic. It's taken years, but very pleasant ones."

"Oh, my, yes. It's the most interesting *hob*by I've ever heard of." Sally May had accepted the conversation, but with a clear and to Mrs. Whiting a somewhat surprising reluctance. "You mean *every*thing here is from your own family home?"

Sally May was trying.

"Only the antiques, dear—the clock and the Maisson figurines, the chair you're sitting in and the Sheraton table with the Bristol vase. —Just about everything movable in here is from Colony Hall, in fact. But the heavier fixtures are from Charleston, too, mostly from houses above Market which were torn down for one modern reason or the other," she continued, then stood and stepped to the mantelpiece. Sally May followed, listening to her off-hand history of the pieces ranged along it.

"Oh, the whole house is *so* beautiful, Mrs. Whiting." Sally May spun in a delighted circle which seemed subtly accustomed to the reign of many ballrooms. "It must be the most beautiful in Belle Meade—in all of Nashville."

"Well, after all, it's just a modern imitation in the suburbs, I suppose." Mrs. Whiting's laughter chimed about Sally May's astonishment like silver and spring rain. "Nashville has its own fine old places," she continued, sitting down. "But since we really had to build, you know, Paul went along with letting me keep a bit of home around me, for myself and so Stephen would have some feeling of my side of the family."

Sally May went and sat back down in the chair opposite Mrs. Whiting, one from an American Hepplewhite set which Mrs. Whiting's mother had prized as her finest furniture. She did look quite right sitting in it, Mrs. Whiting had to admit.

"I believe it's very important to keep the old standards alive in the South today. E*specially* today. Don't you, Mrs. Whiting?"

"No, child, I don't think it's so very important. In fact, I think

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it's often a mistake." She smiled. "But if they're part of one, one needs at least some of them, I suppose." Mrs. Whiting looked off, entirely away for a moment.

"Yes, that's what I mean—the gentleness, the—*el*egance," Sally May found her word. "You know I don't mean the *bad* things."

"It's so hard for me to tell which are which, you see. I suppose that because of my early training I automatically still quite foolishly disapprove of matters which I long ago accepted as reasonable and Christian and necessary. —Negroes, for example. Why, the only ones I ever knew in all my life were menials. I wouldn't know *how* to have one to my home—ever."

"Oh, I could *never* stand that! No one could!" Sally May laughed juicily.

"Gracious, child," Mrs. Whiting's quick gray eyes were shocked beneath her mock amusement. "Whatever 'bad things' did you mean then?"

"Oh, mistreating them, I suppose. I've certainly never believed in *that*. Or any of the simply *trashy* things happening today. —I mean, Father says that Blacks and Whites shouldn't mix socially because neither race would ever like it or could get used to it. *He* says that's the real reason. But he thinks that as long as they stay in their place the Coloreds should have the same chance and everything, and I guess he really thinks maybe it'll be all right to go to college together some day."

Sally May thought hard. "I *think* he said that once," she laughed, "but it doesn't matter to me. I'll never have to."

Mrs. Whiting sighed and shook her head. "Sooner or later the South will have to retreat to adulthood, it seems. Even spoiled, beautiful Charleston, like an aristocratic little girl."

". . . 'An aristocratic little girl'—oh, that's nice!" Sally May was nervous. "Well, I think it's best to not even think about *Negras* and *politics* and things," she said, dismissing the conversation a little desperately. "At least not now," she smiled, "now that I'm so warm and comfy."

Sally May leaned forward. "Mrs. Whiting, would you mind *terr*ibly if I smoked?"

"Goodness no, child. I'll join you, in fact."

She passed Sally May an enamel and silver lighter from the table between them and they lit cigarets.

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"You know, Mrs. Whiting, I'd just simply love to visit Charleston."

Mrs. Whiting smiled, nodding encouragement.

"Has Steve ever been there?"

"Oh, many times, at Christmas and during the summer. But you know Stephen," she laughed. "Except for the game fishing he's not too impressed, I suspect."

"I wonder why Steve's never told me about Charleston?" Sally May said, almost piqued. "Or even about this room," she tried to dull the edge of her resentment, "all your antiques and porcelain *chi*na? And that wonderful Venetian fireplace—so ornate, with tiles and all?"

"That does seem strange, doesn't it?" Mrs. Whiting smiled.

"Well, *I'm* going to ask him to tell me all about it, first thing." A presumptuous smile sought to establish Steve as their common link. "And that should help *him* appreciate it! Why, I think I'd even like to live there . . . some day. Even if it is changing as you say!"

"When he's a little older I'm sure Stephen will come to appreciate Charleston." Mrs. Whiting smiled at the thought, wondering if that were true, if it mattered.

But suddenly, she understood; the small wonder stood clear. All those late months while she had believed her boy to be embarrassed among his friends by his aristocratic forebears—and a natural enough thing that would be too, at his age and in this pragmatic era—he had only been too modest. For now she recalled that since their trip to Charleston that summer she had caught Steve studying the tokens of his family past throughout the house, from the old, stuffy biographies in the library to the silver cups in Paul's study which Sir Henry Clinton himself had presented to his enemy, Captain Osgood Church, in 1781, in appreciation of the use of his home by one of his colonels and staff. And there were other things: once she had overheard a friend of Steve's tease him about deciding between the study of science or of his own family.

It was evident now, that ordinary realization—so trivial, it would seem, to any attention but a mother's—which carried such an extraordinary message to her. Steve had never spoken to Sally

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May about his Charleston heritage because he was proud of it—ignorant and frightened, probably, of its sheer size; but too proud, nevertheless, to waste it.

Mrs. Whiting understood for the first time why Sally May's picture did not sprawl comfortably among the youthful mess of Steve's room as had those of his other girls. She also supposed that though Sally May Campbell might be an important acquisition for Steve during the Christmas party season, in all essentials her son had judged the decorative young fool as correctly as she. In fact, Mrs. Whiting wondered now whether Steve, who was actually of gentler nature than his mother, she knew, might also be no less acute in his judgments. Steve, she realized for the first time, was in his own way becoming a man, and one in whom she might have fresh pride and a fresh respectful love.

The pity was that her own capacities were far too delicate to be direct while talking to Sally May, and that she was forced by that same new pride to ignore the girl's yearning to talk about Steve. She had to be oblique because Sally May, regardless of her affection for Steve, had no true relevance to him, or to her.

Even now, a small silence had fallen between them. Sally May appeared to be a trifle trapped.

"You know, Mrs. Whiting, the same thing must be happening everywhere in the South today. Even Richmond's full of *all* sorts of people." Her voice fell to a genteel whisper, "Just *com*mon types," she confided. "Father says there are more every year."

"But doesn't Mr. Campbell own one of the factories which are bringing the poorer people in from the country?"

"Well, yes—Oh, of course we don't derive our *real* income from the orchards anymore. Why, everyone knows how things have changed. And, you know, Father says that industry is actually good for Virginia."

Sally May pondered the matter. "It's all pretty complicated, isn't it?"

"Yes, dear. It does seem to be."

"But that's just why he believes in holding on to Southern *val*ues for as long as possible." Sally May paused. "I think my father is a very *bal*anced man."

" 'For as long as possible . . .' " Mrs. Whiting mused.

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Sally May sat up and leaned forward in earnest confession. "Mrs. Whiting, I just don't want to ever have to think about *any* of those things: I mean, for *all* my life. All I want is to. . ."

"Then that's why you believe you'd like Charleston, dear?"

"Yes'm. I know I'm probably all wrong, but I just don't care. And that's the truth."

"Well, dear, I think it's quite rare to know a thing like that about yourself at your age."

Mrs. Whiting smiled and pushed a porcelain ashtray nearer Sally May. Then she leaned back, relaxed, but distressed at her judgment.

Bud Pettibone rewrapped the sledge's head in burlap and tied it with wire. String had come loose. He stuffed the crack around the spike with rags and tied a padding across the top as tightly as he could. It took him a while.

Below, Captain Fetherworth studied the young still form stretched out upon the hard mud of the pit. "When Bud's got that spike in good and proper we got to be set to go like the blue blazes," he said to Leroy.

He turned to the others and spoke out, officially. "Now, boys, I want to be honest. We got to be clear. Don't none of us but these kids know anything about caves. I know that. Now, since I'm in charge, all I say is we got to be extra careful and plan things with a little horse sense." He shook his head. "Because I mean I ain't hardly ever seen anyone in as hard-luck a fix as that boy down there. I mean—" he faltered, "it's like I just told old Leroy here, now. We really got us one mean-ass job just to get him out of that hole up to where we are. And Lord knows that's just the beginning." He shook his big head before the thought.

"We better go about this just like it's some growed-over quarry accident and not let this dark bother us a-tall. We just got to plain forget about being down in a cave, that's what."

Solemn-faced country men and boys, they stood or sat in a nervous circle around the brink, murmuring approval.

Beneath their stony determination to save a fallen, broken boy, there was in each man a primal revulsion from the sterile stone surrounding them. Each had longed to hear it disgraced. More fundamental than mere superstition, which played its part, was

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their natural hatred of a dark which the sun of day had never lit, of rock which had known no fertile earth upon it, of water which dripped, dripped in that dark like a secret and impure fluid, flowing to no known pond or brook or well, destined to quench the thirst of no living thing these men cared about. They stood afraid but resolved within, before the duty which a stern Jehovah had provided them as a test just as clearly as He had challenged the fortitude of any Old Testament hero; without, they were rough and unbothered and colloquial, masking their courage and denying the undisguisable fear in their eyes with silly jokes which ended in nervous silence. But every bit helped. Now each knew that Captain Ernest Fetherworth hated the cave as much as any of them. Now its powers were formally dishonored as mundane, as threats which any good group of fellows could handle well enough.

"Why, that's right." Bud Pettibone was hearty, looking down from his mess of wire and rags from one to the other of the three boys whom he assumed were the victim's good friends. "It don't matter none. We got plenty of light—plenty of everything—"

"Except oxygen." The voice was Binkley's, brimmed dark with the currents of misery which Arch or Pete had never heard in him before—or at least until Steve's fall, Arch remembered, as he studied Binkley's hard yet altered face.

A man like an amiable bear half-laughed. "Hell, son, there's enough air down here for all of Nashville, with a few little old county seats throwed in extra."

"Not if he's caught pneumonia." Binkley let it sink in. "It's fifty-eight degrees in here all the time and one hundred damn percent humidity. And I figure he's been out down there just about long enough to be dead of it."

"Binkley," Arch protested. "There's no need in that sort. . ."

"Oh, I reckon he's still alive all right. Oh, I reckon! I just reckon he's fine, in fact."

Above, Bud Pettibone lifted the sledgehammer over his head.

Captain Fetherworth appraised the boy. But for his eyes which, tormented, were out of place—new looking—Binkley was as fair and as firm (and about as human, the Captain thought) as a plank of hickory. He already had the neck and shoulders and arms of a powerful, perhaps a dangerous man. 'A tough kid with a warm

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heart and a mean-as-hell tongue,' Captain Fetherworth decided to himself.

Bud Pettibone's blow boomed through the cavern like a muffled explosion. The smooth flowstone beneath them quaked. Somewhere, loose stone rattled and warned. The second and third blows followed immediately, the leaden echoes edged into silence.

The men sat still now, not looking at each other.

Far down the passage a great stone fell, and fell. Finally, they heard it crash its last time. Afterwards, some swore that they had also heard the dark splash of water.

Binkley was out of things, off by himself on the rock overlooking the pit where he had spent the last six hours, where he had appointed himself for them all the watcher in the dark.

"That ought to do the old trick!" Bud Pettibone leapt from the slight overhang where he had driven the six-inch spike about six feet directly above the pit's ledge.

Captain Fetherworth felt all eyes turn upon him.

A little frown of reflection stepped its pretty way across Sally May's forehead. "I just want to be sincere, that's all. I mean about *every*thing, Mrs. Whiting. That's the heritage of the best people in the South, I think. And that's what the Southern way of life means to me—sincerity."

Mrs. Whiting nodded agreeably. "Yes, I suppose the best people are always the honest people, anywhere." Her face seemed sharp yet soft to Sally May, like that of a small, wise deer. "But it's awfully hard to be honest, of course, until circumstance forces you to." She smiled. "To either yourself, or God."

Honesty, sincerity: Sally May craved her own manner of their exchange with Mrs. Whiting that evening, not some inward study or a humble admission upon the knees but that limp release of her yearnings—in small-talk, in an atmosphere of relaxed and good-mannered acceptance—which was her limit in considering any value so complicated. That she was failing, that this gracious and bewildering woman halted her at every hint of Steve, she feared to be indicative of Mrs. Whiting's possible suspicion of her full affair with him. —Not of incapacity: not of dishonesty.

Even if the fact of their sleeping together came out, here in this soft-lit room of heritage and elegance, Sally May believed that the

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passionate reiteration of her love for Steve, her hope of marriage to him soon, would serve the situation in simple charm, just because it was true. Everyone knew that being in love assured this victory.

It would be a fabulous June wedding. She would go North with him that fall and keep house in one of those old brick mansions while he went to school. He would study his scientific whatever-it-was and she would have babies and dress them prettily and take them for walks in the park. They would meet nice people and make contacts. Afterwards, they would take over Campbell Hall, of course—perhaps summering in Charleston!—and Steve could work for her father somehow—who would soon retire. To Sally May it was all clear, practical, and perfect.

What bothered her most was the sudden, snickering suspicion that none of this, even the part about sex, would annoy Mrs. Whiting so much as it would bore her.

"Now we can really get moving," Captain Fetherworth said. "Bud, you rest a bit. That was a hard reach out over there."

He turned and pointed. "Bimms, you and Turk rig up that block-and-tackle." The bearish fellow—a friend of Pettibone's—and a swarthy farmer with pocked cheeks and gross, tobacco-stained lips climbed to the overhang with a three-pulley block.

"You all be sure to set the rope square in the groove of that bottom sheave," Captain Fetherworth called, "or there's a mean tear on the rim that'll cut into it. And I mean shag-ass on it."

The doctor spoke with professional seriousness. "I'm afraid that the lad is right about that oxygen. There's nothing we need more for that boy."

"Well, we just better get off the pot and get him out, then." Captain Fetherworth was peevish. "We didn't know nothing about all that, Doc, and there ain't no use I can see in us jawing about it now."

Ernie was ashamed. There were five portable cylinders in the armory and it had not occurred to him to bring them along. This rescue frightened him. He had known all along that it demanded a better-educated man to lead it.

He turned away from the doctor, and from the thoughts he knew could collapse him. "Hey, you boys there—Arch and Pete

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and Binkley and that Jesse kid,—ain't you all got them ropes and clamps and the stretcher set up yet?" He was suddenly brisk. "Birdy," he said to a thin, dark young man, a feed-store clerk, "you know some first aid. Well, you going to help the doc, hear me? Your brother Tom, too. You stick right with him and do whatever he says."

He waved a fattish, sad-faced youth and a hawk-nosed and rotten-toothed older fellow to his side. "You start rigging up the lights, Little Turk. I want you and your buddy Austin to watch them for me when we start hauling that kid out." He looked about.

"There, I reckon that's a start." He fumbled for his cigarets with nervous fingers. "Leroy, you stick with me, OK?"

Leroy nodded. He handed Ernie his pack.

"Lord, Lord, we should have had all this done when we first got here." Captain Fetherworth lit a cigaret. He breathed the smoke deeply.

"We only been here a few minutes as it is, Ernie," Leroy said. "Everything's going fine, buddy, just fine."

Captain Fetherworth looked around. "Well, fourteen sure ain't many. I *thought* we should have brung the rest of those fellows at the entrance along. I mean, whether they wanted to come or not."

"That's what I like about you and Mr. Whiting," Sally May cooed. "You're both such sin*cere* people . . . like Steve," she added with that same irritating dreaminess.

"Why, thank you, Sally May. It's very sweet of you to say so. And I do think Stephen is a very genuine boy. Of course, I've always felt myself that our particular Southern adjective might be 'relaxed'. It seems to explain the South very nicely, all the way from its aristocracy to its injustice."

"Oh—yes . . . " Sally May felt vague, apprehensive of whatever casual blasphemy might next trip from the lips of this lovely woman. "I just mean that sort of *friend*liness and charm one always finds in the *best* Southern people—like you, and like my own people, if you don't mind my saying so."

Mrs. Whiting watched Sally May's smile. Then for the first time, the clear actual tone of the snob descended upon the young girl's voice from where it had been hovering from the very mo-

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ment, Mrs. Whiting suspected, of Sally May's doubtlessly gracious conception:

"I suppose Colony Hall has always been very well known in Charleston?"

The simpleton was no longer charming.

After her restraint at so much innocent ignorance—or stupidity (she had not until this moment been able to decide which)—Mrs. Whiting felt her old familiar disgust for the fraudulent rise within her like steam from her very blood. For there were few aristocrats. And snobs knew nothing whatsoever about them, particularly, it had always seemed to her, when of aristocratic heritage themselves. To Mrs. Whiting, no one could possibly be both. Once a single symptom of the snob's incurable condition could be positively identified, that syndrome was complete, the diagnosis ultimate and unshakable. It was one of Mrs. Whiting's few absolute convictions.

She laughed, and managed to continue the conversation without pause.

"Oh, my yes! Colony Hall has played quite an important role in Carolina history."

"Really?" Sally May, fretting and constrained, could only hope that her interest seemed genuine, that her fear was bound and hidden, deep beyond any escape into talk.

"But don't you think it's awfully late to go into those old stories, Sally May?"

"I guess. I don't care." This time Sally May heard her voice flatten and coil upon itself. She was, she felt sure, being shamed by Mrs. Whiting, told that her own heritage was inferior, that her blood and body were not pure enough for her Steve.

But to Mrs. Whiting, the cold snakes of envy, withdrawing into the impenetrable young eyes, were pathetic things. It seemed absurd that Sally May, with her own First Family ancestry, could so bitterly resent the mere mention of some trivial history so remote from her own. Sally May probably viewed all such matters competitively. She would doubtlessly succeed nicely in the world as it was and in that South which surely lay ahead of her. But Sally May was not and could never be counted among the authentic of any group, anywhere or anytime.

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Mrs. Whiting felt suddenly, strangely sorry for this desperate, this fundamentally vulgar young girl.

"Honey, it's just that when I get wound up there's no stopping me at all," she laughed. "Wouldn't you like for me to ring Mabel for tea instead?" She looked at her watch. "It's nearly midnight, but I think she must still be back there, finishing the Christmas baking."

"Well," Sally May's eyes managed to soften, then shine, "I guess that does sound awfully good." She had decided to volunteer nothing. She and Steve were safe; they would do what they wanted, no matter how much Mrs. Whiting thought she knew. Anyway, once she had Steve's ring on her finger, all Mrs. Whiting's precious Charleston would be hers.

Little Turk and Austin were setting carbide lamps and gasoline lanterns about the pit. Birdy Evans and his brother Tom were spreading the contents of the doctor's bag upon a table rock at his direction, while he prepared hypodermics well ahead of time. Above them all, Gutherie Bimms and Bud Pettibone were meeting difficulties with the block and tackle.

Time was an undertow as they labored toward the rescue.

Arch was explaining. "Binkley went all the way down on a little old nylon about as thin as a pencil and hung right up over Steve with a light. But coming up—"

"Oh, let it go, Arch."

"Now, we can't do nothing a-tall till the boys got things set." The Captain paused. "Did you slip down that thing, Binkley?"

The boy nodded, with a shrug.

"Let's see your hands." It was Leroy.

"My God in Heaven!" Captain Fetherworth grabbed his wrists. "They're skinned plain raw." He looked at Binkley oddly. "Boy, are you teched? Why didn't you tell us?"

"It's not much important right now, is it?"

"No, we ain't got the time to monkey with you, if that's what's bothering you so much. But, all the same, boy—"

The doctor was already at their side.

"You can get on with things, Captain," he said after a quick inspection. "He's all right. But, youngster, you need bandages right this minute or you still could wind up in bad shape. Now

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then, young man, just why didn't you tell Captain Fetherworth or me about this right away and save us some time?"

"Just forgot, I guess."

Leroy's voice was soft with knowing. "Forgot?—Over there pulling on those stretcher straps? Son, man to man, now, that kind of business don't prove a damned thing."

Binkley's glare dared down the issue. "You know so all-fired much about what things prove?"

The doctor sent Birdy for salve and gauze. Tom grasped Binkley's wrists while the doctor spread the pungent white jelly over the flayed palms and fingers and began wrapping wide cotton strips around his hand.

Captain Fetherworth stood aside and placed a heavy paw on Binkley's outstretched arm. "Well," he said affably, "I'm sure glad we don't have two of you fool spe-lunking kids to haul out of there."

Something made the Captain want to hold Binkley's favor. "So, you couldn't tell a thing about his injuries?"

"There ain't nothing in this world to tell but what I did right off when you all got back here—about two weeks ago." Binkley looked far, through the walls of the cave, it seemed, deep into memory. "It just shouldn't have happened to *him* . . . I bet he's all broke up, just broke up inside like anything, the way he fell." Binkley's tongue was thick. "He was turned funny. I couldn't see much blood, like I said, but—well, he was turned all funny, that's all."

"Well, I reckon he broke quite a few bones, all right." Captain Fetherworth held his finger for the knot that the doctor was tying. "Let's just hope there's nothing worse wrong with him."

"You just tickle me to death. Don't you know damned well he's got his head hurt, bad? And down *there?*"

"Binkley, boy," Leroy clamped Binkley's thick shoulder. "We just got to do what we can and hope for the best. That's all we can do. You know that, son. Now, you just take it easy for a while. Everything's going fine."

Still, from within his anguished silence, Binkley stared straight ahead. Leroy and Captain Fetherworth looked upon him a helpless moment and then turned toward the brink.

"You boys set?" Captain Fetherworth called.

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"In maybe two shakes, Cap'n," Gutherie Bimms said. "I think we about got this blamed block rigged."

"Means maybe another five minutes," Ernie muttered to Leroy.

"Then get to it!"

Bud and Gutherie attached the stretcher to the rope that fell to an eye-splice from the block and tackle, dangling like a ripe and evil fruit above the pit's cruel depth.

"We done it!" Bud leapt down beside Captain Fetherworth, heaving breathlessly. "Cap'n—I'd—I'd like to be the one to go down there to get that kid on the stretcher." He paused, fumbling. "Because—well, I just feel like it, if it's OK by you."

"Why, I don't know why not, Bud. Just—"

"I reckon I'm the one, Ernie." Leroy's interruption was matter-of-fact.

"See, Bud," he explained, turning to the broad decent face nearly a full foot above him. "I'm little and you're about as big as a breed bull in March, like old Ernie, or Bimms—and I wouldn't trust the Doc here to be able to get down that rope."

Then, turning to the Captain. "I'm pretty fair on the rope, Ernie, and I got me on a good pair of nail-stud boots for the job."

"Man," Pete whispered to Arch, "what if he knew about Steve banging his daughter?"

"I don't know." Arch thought about it. "It might not make any difference to a fellow like Leroy."

"Suits me, Cap'n," Bud laughed, his disappointment as apparent as a boy's. "Let Leroy go ahead. He's about half-monkey anyway, and I'd probably break that little old line at that."

"Check him first for broken bones," directed the doctor. "Immobilize any breaks. Otherwise, move him as little as possible."

"Yeah, Leroy," the Captain fidgeted. "Cut up his clothes real careful-like," he went on, excited now. "Then we'll send down the stretcher and some more Colemans, if you need 'em."

"I just reckon I better take me along a big flashlight too, in case any of them mantles flame out." Leroy's manner was mild and sure.

Captain Fetherworth realized then that there was nothing more for him to say. Leroy knew as much as he. "Well, move along, then," he added in weak but relieved retreat to second place.

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Turk handed Leroy a five-celled light. All fell silent. Leroy clamped a coil of tough cord to his web belt and checked for his knife and canteen. He stuck a rolled-up Sunday newspaper in his belt. A half-pint of cheap rye gurgled in his breast pocket. He took his carbide lamp from his cap and adjusted it down to a half-inch flame so it would not burn through his climb-rope while he was slithering down. He lit a cigaret on the lamp's flame, then replaced it.

Leroy stood, smoking deeply while Arch finished tying a huge bowline-on-a-bight to the work-end of the thinner safety line and handed him the double-looped knot. Leroy rolled up his sweater and slung it through his crotch from the back of his belt to the front. He tied it over the buckle. Then he stepped into the double bowline and slid the loops tight over the sweater padding in his groin and high about his thighs with the knot itself pulled up above his belt in back.

Leroy was ready. He flipped the cigaret up into the tunnel which had led them into the room. He put on his heavy gloves, picked up the climb-rope and, grasping it tightly, lay down, then half-rolled to the edge.

Arch showed Gutherie Bimms how to act as safety man and control the gradual, taut release of safety line as Leroy needed it. Then he joined Binkley back at the pit. He stood silently beside him.

Austin and Little Turk had set the large lights about the edge, pointing down, so that the great chamber beneath them was flooded with the intense and unreal whiteness of the vapor light. Steve was clearly visible now, as indifferent as sleep. Captain Fetherworth and Bud played the beams from the two twelve-cell floods upon Leroy while Birdy and his brother Tom lowered two double-mantled Coleman gasoline lanterns very carefully towards the floor of the pit, always just a few feet above Leroy so that he could remove them quickly from their ropes once down. Leroy's shadow fell very large from the brink of the well to its floor; sometimes it passed like a slow black bird across Steve's body.

Right before Leroy passed beyond view Captain Fetherworth spoke once more. "Just take it *real* easy, Leroy."

"Any ways I can get it." Leroy stopped climbing and grinned

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up one last time. "Don't tell my old woman, but once we're out of this hole I'll celebrate with something plump and young and sugarsweet."

He winked at Binkley. "And don't you worry, sport. Just keep old Ernie from falling in on top of me, will you?"

He ducked from view.

Binkley had not heard. He was watching the rope as it jerked sturdily upon the flowstone brink with each of Leroy's unseen movements. After awhile, he left Arch's side and clambered up on a rock overlooking the pit, and sat, possessing it as would a child or a king, studying Leroy's figure as he descended, inches at a time, into the pit, where Steve Whiting lay as gray and as flat as spilled clothing.

Mrs. Whiting had asked her son that week what Sally May Campbell was like and Stephen had answered, "Wait till you meet her. She's just what you see. A knockout and a lot of laughs." But Mrs. Whiting was not worried at her boy's taste in girls. Of course Stephen wanted the prettiest girl—Mrs. Whiting was sure she must be—in Nashville's Stokes Belmont Academy. He was nineteen. But Steve was no fool, and given a few months Sally May would certainly pass.

She wondered in sudden fear if there had been or might be sex between them, then laughed at her own foolishness. She realized that they were not children—not today—but both were still innocent enough, she was sure, and Steve, at least, was too carefully brought up to go further in his little romance than he realized young people of their backgrounds should.

It was merely a matter of deciding which route to Sally May's most private and vulnerable ear might be most readily opened to her. There was no question in Mrs. Whiting's mind that here firm words would be weak. Thinking then of Steve—while that strong new love of hers, suddenly so particular to this night, warned her to risk the injury of no one for whom he cared in any way—Mrs. Whiting prepared to take the careful, crucial, and kindly step, away from those questions and statements which, however considerately advanced, would certainly leave the world and South and self of Sally May in final ruin, leveled beyond restoration and shocked beyond concern. While Mabel was setting the

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tea, Mrs. Whiting prayed for that bit of Christian patience which would lead her before the evening ended to say one thing that might serve as moral nourishment, in a small way, to the anemia of the young girl's thoughts.

"I'm terribly sorry that girl is so slow, Sally May," she remarked in a whisper after Mabel had left.

She poured tea.

"Oh, *that's* all right, Mrs. Whiting. Servants are such a problem these days."

Sally May toyed again with Steve's ring, watching the older woman. Distracted by a mood which had passed her by, still eager to tell about her feelings for Steve, she felt helpless, and a little hurt.

"Cream, dear? One sugar, isn't it?"

Sally May nodded, beautiful and blank. Mrs. Whiting passed her a cup, then the small sandwiches. For a moment, they sipped and nibbled in genteel opposition.

Mrs. Whiting understood that her quest of Sally May's need could be accomplished only by the careful removal of her habitual disguise—her snobbism. Poses, of course, were necessary. The problem in an immature person was in deciding whether the major pose approximated a potential approach to maturity—as Sally May's did not. In judging the young—and Mrs. Whiting believed in judgment, not analysis—one had to remember that maturity, like taste, may perhaps begin with acting, but never in fakery.

What this issue meant to Mrs. Whiting, not of the South either of Charleston or Nashville but of Twentieth Century America, was that the offered choice provided the only true turning point in life. The Lord's merciful concern, Mrs. Whiting knew, was never indulgent. Finally, she could only hope that her own son had passed that point rightly. It was then no God-given blessing but a human achievement thus to choose to succeed, to be able to point back one distant day upon those alien years and say, "Ah, yes! It was *there,*" as failure could never say, since memory is the kindest of liars, "*Here* is where I lost."

"You see, dear," she began again, "it is rather difficult for me to believe that the world of Colony Hall ever really existed quite as I recall it. For me it was an idyll, of both the intellect and the soul.

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Few could ever know what it meant to me, child," she sighed, "because, thank the dear Lord, one has time in this life to choose only the very few who might understand."

"I see," Sally May whispered throatily. "I appreciate that."

For a moment, Mrs. Whiting wondered whether something of her message had already filtered through to Sally May. After all, that cold nastiness of envy had disappeared from her talk and manner. Mrs. Whiting wondered, and decided not. The snob in Sally May had merely gone to sleep and left the child alone—until the morning. Their crucial moment of change, their bridge of exchange, was now, or would be never.

Sally May's acute discomfort, slightly relaxed now, still held her taut young body breathless.

"There with all the familiar malignancies and victorious vulgarities of our world simply ignored, I was able to find a self which at least prepared me for this or any lesser place. Certainly much of the pomposity and mediocrity which distress me in people today was also there, child, as here or anywhere. But one's discovery of one's self is so solitary and such a continuous affair that no one else is really able to touch it—ever. These are the sort of reasons I had to leave Colony Hall. By seeking the real world I found those matters which I have been discussing with you, and in discovering them, you see, I found myself. —As I trust you shall, dear, one day."

"Well, of course, I guess you do have to *try* with everyone." Sally May smiled. "That's what you mean, isn't it?"

"Not at all, dear."

Were their words, then, of the same language, of the same meaning? Did she command any portion of the world shared by Sally May? Which of them was the more insufficient; which of them more ordained by the age to speak for any stone of its foundation? Mrs. Whiting did not know—no longer cared—and shaken by her ignorance, found herself both desperate and firm in her determination.

"Wow!" Sally May smiled, oblivious and blank. "No wonder Steve's so smart! You sure must think an awful lot, Mrs. Whiting. I don't guess I understand very much of it, but I know I never met anyone—any *la*dy, anyway—who could talk so beautifully about life, and all."

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Sally May's disturbance was full upon her, but unclear. Her flattery Mrs. Whiting dismissed as a lack of anything pertinent to say. Mrs. Whiting hoped only that within their evident cross purposes the girl had not glimpsed herself as the subject of those carefully ambiguous denunciations. But that was not likely. She was still impenetrable, still remotely there before her like a glossy mannikin encased in ice. Thus protected, Sally May was probably fully spared the dreadful power of self-recognition.

"Again, not at all, dear," Mrs. Whiting said. "It's just that I've lived a while longer than you. And am inclined to ramble a bit, I'm afraid," she added, laughing. "You must forgive a talkative old lady."

"I really don't understand very *much* of this, Mrs. Whiting," Sally May ventured. "I mean, what it has to do with a girl like me. Or with Steve."

"Don't you see, child? I am speaking of what one must *earn,* to achieve a unique dignity, of what—"

"It's just that I've already heard—well, things like that. Steve's said it all to me, nearly, plenty of times." She laughed thinly, "That is, when I let him carry on the way he likes."

"I am glad to hear that, because, Sally May, I have been afraid for a long time that Steve might well end up exactly like everyone else today—though, I suppose, a superior edition in most superficial ways—with too many goals and too many choices and not enough of his own individual identity to tell many of them apart, as just another student-body president for all his life. Steve, you see, like you, dear, has had some things too easy."

"But I still just don't understand, Mrs. Whiting. Why, you almost sound like you think it's wrong to have a—a birthright to The Best. I mean, what's wrong with having a lovely house, and—"

"Birthright?—Yes, I suppose it is something like that." She paused. "But a fortunate circumstance of birth only presents several superior elements of choice fairly early in life, which I am not sure is fortunate at all. For the challenges to the spirit offered by wealth and culture are dangerous and subtle challenges, you see, providing too much for some, Sally May, and too soon."

"I think it's like my father said." Sally May laughed. " 'If God hadn't wanted some people to have money and advantages He

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wouldn't have passed them out at the door.' That's what *he* says."

"Well, I'm sure he wasn't being serious, Sally May."

Mrs. Whiting paused, emptying all into irritation.

"But I wonder, dear, if you are yourself not too much in love with the incidentals of place? Place, you see, is only an accident, whether of Charleston or Nashville, Richmond or even a New York. Place is trivial. It shapes, but never forms."

Sally May, listening for a cruder point and unable to gather Mrs. Whiting's words upon her heart of considerations, was relieved. This complicated stuff was all Steve's mother had in her mind. —Not Steve and her. Mrs. Whiting did not know.

"Well, maybe that about places, because," she grinned, "I guess I do prefer *nice* places. But, Mrs. Whiting," the girl went on, seeming at least interested now, "you've *got* to understand others, don't you, to understand yourself?"

"No, child, no!" Mrs. Whiting laughed. "Listen now, doesn't it really make a better sense the other way—that you best understand others through the understanding of yourself?"

"Well, I think it must be *both,* then." Sally May sipped her tea down, her prettiness suddenly alight with a small triumph. "Because *that's* why Steve is so popular!" She sat forward. "He under*stands* people."

Mrs. Whiting poured Sally May another cup of tea and added cream and sugar. She stirred it and smiled as she passed it across, nodding her head very slightly.

"Yes, of course understanding must work outward as well as inward to do much good."

She thought a moment, then decided to risk even Steve upon her point, to use her own boy to prove its truth.

"I think Steve has perhaps glimpsed that all along. —But where does understanding begin, Sally May?" she asked, reflecting with confident warmth upon those new depths within her boy. "Any philosopher, any book worth its reading will tell you exactly what the Bible does: within the spirit, child; understanding has no other home."

"Well, I *think* that's what I mean, about Steve—" Sally May held on, still dredging the opaque swamp of herself for the one magic compliment about Steve which would at once bestow insight upon herself, flatter Mrs. Whiting, and release her from this tension of conversation.

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"Steve has been popular, as you say," Mrs. Whiting went on, "and for—oh, lots of admirable reasons, I suppose. But profundity of any sort is hardly likely to be among them, I'm afraid." She smiled. "Steve has actually got along so well with people because he's found out so very little about them, I suspect, and until quite recently, Sally May," she added almost beneath her breath, "about himself."

Mrs. Whiting sought in Sally May now only one slight sign that the girl was reflecting upon these remarks, or even upon the probable fact that she, Steve's mother, had been the first to chance them at all, to anyone.

There was none; she had built no bridge. She had, as Steve put it at times, "gambled and lost."

Sally May sat across the table of crumb-strewn plates and tea-stained cups, stunned beyond reflection. The woman was a snob, a snob who did not even love her own son.

The dampish air of the cold pit was smarting with light and cut by patching shadows as Leroy descended toward the fallen boy. He welcomed this task, and he mightily welcomed its hard solitude. He had no fear itching him, for himself or his success.

This Steve, this big-rich, hot-shot Nashville athlete, had known his daughter's body, Leroy was pretty certain, about as well as a man could know a woman, and Leroy felt holy-bound to save him for lots of reasons—so many and such complicated reasons that even though some of them were a little mean Leroy thought that it must have been the Good Lord Himself who had seen to it that he was right down there that minute. To Leroy, even with the scabby-mean part the whole business felt more like the Lord's work than any churchy business he had ever done.

He swung out from each kick against the wall, riding down the slack a foot or so each time, trusting that the guys on that safety up above on the ledge understood how to drop him quick and proper. But the climb-rope was thick and holding fast, and the double-bowline nooses of the safety line were snug and high enough on his hips. About a yard on either side of him and sliding on down right along a little above him was a Coleman lantern, each crazy with its hell-raking vapor light. Ernie and the boys had the stretcher ready to come after him whenever he hollered. The gang up there was about as set for this as they would ever be.

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Leroy was just beginning to rest easy in his mind that everything was going to go smooth for him too, all the way down, and that he might have a chance to ponder a bit on how they meant to get this boy up from here and out of the cave (and maybe something about what it all meant to him and to his youngster—she was only fifteen) when his feet plunged out against nothing at all where the wall should by rights have been, and Leroy felt himself go swinging and spinning like a bob on some frowsy old twine.

He held on and rode it through, hunching his weight up at the wrong times to break his spin and cursing himself for no brains all the while. He knew damned well the sides belled in under the top, but he had not paid the fact any mind. When he had slowed to about a pendulum rate, he decided that he would start taking this place with some seriousness. It could grab a man sure as it had a boy.

"How you all doing down there, Leroy?"

"Why, just fine, Ernie! And how you all doing up there?"

"Well," Ernie sounded doubtful, "the boys here said the rope felt like you was having trouble. Now, you yell out if you do, hear me, Leroy?"

"Sure thing, Ernie." He slid down another foot or so.

So, they could not see him, not even Binkley now. Why yell? He was as on his own as he ever hoped to be, like this Steve boy had been; like that Binkley kid too, when he had ripped the mortal fire out of his hands trying to keep from falling in after him.

And the boys had only had a little old nylon line not hardly enough to get a grip on. This one was a good manila, heavy as sin itself to carry all the way back here, even in two, but pleasant and hairy and heavy under the hand. It was funny; it reminded Leroy of a good wrench, somehow. He scrunched his feet in on it to brake another little slither and he considered how quick it slid between them but yet held him fast, obeying smooth as a fine tool—that was it. His gloves were rough leather and his boots, with their bright little stub nails, comforted all the half-dangling bottom part of him.

He stopped to rest a moment. "Hold it up, up there," he called. "While I catch me some breath."

Leroy felt the safety go firm of slack. No one answered, though

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the murmurs of the nervous and aimless talk above him eased him a bit. They knew right enough that he did not feel like jawing back and forth and up and down from here.

Leroy looked down and about. He was about halfway, and headed straight. Steve and Binkley after him must have rested down along in this very same air he was breathing right now. There was a little ledge off to one side, too far to reach but nice to look at because it was a place a man would be safe on if he could only get to it. It made a real difference, and it made this a natural place to hang and rest.

Steve lay maybe fifteen or eighteen feet directly beneath him and to the left, right below the lantern on that side of the pit. A raw spot on the wall glared like a new wound right under Leroy's feet. The boy had struck that corner on the way down. The broken rock lay beside him, in a trickle of pale water. His helmet lay in it, too.

Steve's head was turned from here, but Leroy could make out the bruise on his forehead better than he had been able to from above. It was a right smart welt, all right, but more of a lump than a fracture, he bet. But the turn of the right foot inside that bloody pantsleg that had bothered them all still looked like a mean break. And his right arm was bent wrong under his back like it must be snapped, too.

Leroy took a last look at the handsome young city-boy face, damp and gray and no look at all for a young boy to have on him, and he started down again, jerking the climb-rope first as a signal. He tried to tell himself that down here a few broken bones would be a lucky escape for Steve, so long as his head was not hurt as bad as they feared.

Leroy's feet scraped rock, a boulder to one side that it was just as wise to stay off of, the top was so slicked-over and still so far from the floor. Leroy looked to study the quality of the mud-spot he was fixing to land on, tugged for safety slack and slid a few more feet, then let go.

It was a hard floor, not mud but mud turned to rock. What had looked like loose gravel was a kind of pudding stone, too.

"I'm down!" he shouted as he stood up. "Let me have that left-hand lantern first."

The right-hand lantern slid down a few feet.

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"The left one! *My* left, you cob-brained hill-billies, you!"

The other Coleman slid right into his hands. No one joked back.

Leroy looked up. It was one crazy sight, and it struck him then that he was the first man in the world to ever see it in this particular view. Maybe that was part of what these boys crawled around down here in mud for. Leroy saw how that would be smartly satisfying to any kid, because it even was to him.

The pit was a fat-bottomed bell, all right, the sides almost sheer and mostly wet. What they had been calling the top, where the faces bunched over like so many white and brown flowers to one side, was really about half-way. Shining up his five cell, Leroy could see how the pit climbed on and on to a narrow chimney as far above them as he was below. It was a thing to ponder.

He untied the lanterns and set them down, one at Steve's head, the other to one side of his feet. He took off his carbide lamp from his cap, turned the smoke-tongue up fine and long, and set it where his hand could reach it.

Leroy took a good look at Steve, and he felt encouraged. The face was gray-pale in the garish flame of the Colemans, but there was no splotch of blood, no look of pain on the deep-slumbering features. The lump over his eye was okay—hardly seemed enough to keep him out for so long, in fact.

He reached for the free left wrist and fingered a weak, fast, but steady pulse. He put his ear down to the boy's mouth. The breathing was light and thin, steady too, but not much good for all his places that were needing plenty of air right now. Leroy knew that that Binkley kid had been right. This was going to be Steve's trouble—getting enough air out of all this near-mist until he was back outside and in a hospital.

Leroy unclasped his canteen, then leaned back on his knees and searched for the pint of raw whiskey. But a few fiery drops on the lips proved that the boy was way over appreciating it. Steve never stirred. He could not take in water now or soon.

Leroy thanked God, gently and deeply, that there was a good doctor waiting up there for them both. And he was grateful that even he, just a mechanic with grease clogging his pores for good, knew a thing or two about what to do and not to do.

Leroy began his inspection. He cut up Steve's clothes with his

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knife. It was a sad and terrible time for Leroy, and the lack of blood, suddenly meaning not one good thing in this case, was so remarkable it was wisdom to forget it. Right away it got hard to see how this Steve boy could be worse off.

The slit up the right pantsleg exposed two plugs of red bone sticking out from the ankle, and further up a mess of watery blood told Leroy that Steve's kneecap was fractured. The left leg was only skinned up here and there. Everything appeared to be on his right.

Leroy gathered the boy in his arms and lifted out his arm. The wrist dangled like rags from a break a few inches up. The bone was not quite through the red-swollen flesh but all ready to go, so it had to be pulled back half-set anyway before the boy could make the trip to the doc, thirty-five feet or so up on that bluff.

Someone shouted from above but the echo knocked the words silly.

"What?" Leroy shouted back. "But, slow!"

"Do—you—want—the—stret-cher—now?" It was that Binkley, sitting off to one side on a rock overhang, still worried more than the others, Leroy figured, because of what he had done for Steve.

"No! I'll—let—you—know!"

Leroy took off Steve's belt. When he unbuttoned his fatigue-type overalls, Leroy wished that the doctor was down there instead of him. Steve's right ribs seemed to give too much, but Leroy had no idea how to tell whether they were broken without pressing down on the lungs. He was not about to risk that.

Which was when Leroy noticed the worst thing so far: Steve's chest was still now; he did not seem to be breathing at all.

Leroy leaned over to listen again, and he nearly shouted out in an amazed joy when he heard that same shallow suck of air. It became something wonderful to Leroy then that the kid had made it this far. He was hurt something terrible, somewhere all inside. Leroy figured that youth alone was about all Steve had left to pull him through.

He tried whiskey again, slapping Steve's chill cheeks on either side. But his god-awful sleep stayed deep and cold.

"Oh, Jesus," Leroy murmured. "Just don't let *me* do anything wrong! And give the kid a little luck, huh?"

He splashed whiskey over the break in the ankle and then

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rolled up part of his newspaper around the ankle and tied it with his heavy cord.

"Stretcher!" he called, and for maybe a second he watched it start down right away from the block and tackle Bud Pettibone had rigged, swinging about in the air like a lazy plank and looking like a good hundred feet above him.

He tied the knees steady then and was pulling the arm out straight when he noticed that the stain on the ankle-paper was already bright and wide. He took Steve's belt and wrapped it deep into his thigh and he jabbed in a hole where it met for the do-hickey to go through. It looked sloppy and too tight but the blood stopped. Then he finished with the arm. Leroy was glad the doctor was up there to undo anything he had done wrong.

The stretcher bobbed above his head now, the distant faces blooming down on him in that same silence.

"All right!" Leroy waved.

In a moment he had caught the aluminum and canvas rig—an Army salvage piece and worth ten times its price.

Leroy set the stretcher down beside the boy, straight out now in whatever wild and fast-dimming sleep he had fallen into, and then laid out the stretcher straps ready to tie him fast.

Assured that his back was in one piece, Leroy kneeled at what he figured was about the right distance from Steve to handle him the least and the fastest. Then he lifted him up on his arms. Steve was a lot bigger than Leroy, and strong as he was the firm quietness this little job needed made it mean to bring off. But in a moment, Steve was lying square in the middle of the canvas, his head turned towards Leroy with a glint of blue eyes slitting dully through.

Leroy tightened the straps on the side he was on, then moved to the other. That was when he saw the other head wound.

"Oh, dear God A-Mighty," Leroy murmured.

A hairy mass of blood and bone-fleck, it was, an inch above the neck in the middle of the swell-out into the skull proper. It was soft and messy and, not touching it to see, there was no doubt at all to Leroy that it went all the way inside. —Steve's helmet had fallen off before he had struck bottom. His brains were just sitting there, all but wide open to the chill and dank.

Steve was probably dying, right now.

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Leroy knelt there beside the boy, his hand upon a solid young shoulder his own daughter had probably bitten in passion. His thoughts were vast and the seconds immense while he worked away at the straps.

He had always seemed a likely sort of boy when he came out to the cave and parked in Leroy's drive. Leroy reckoned he was, at that. A bit of a show-off, he was, but all real enough—getting there.

He knew well enough how his girl threw around every considerel thing she had all over the countryside. Leroy knew it had not been rape—not with her. It was more strange than infuriating to him now to think that this boy's groin had labored over his own daughter's, and it was sad to think it might never labor again over any woman, never seed children and know that soft release and quiet.

As he worked, tense in swift caution, Leroy could not find his anger for all his sadness. That had always been a fault, or something.

And his girl was only fifteen. They had left something out in rearing her, he supposed, but Leroy still did not know just what, and now he never would. All he had wanted with Steve when he had guessed about them carrying-on was to have him out to the place and let him see what kind of people they were, decent and proud and up to anyone, no matter what he had thought of them because she had been so easy for a near-grown city boy like him to take as he pleased.

And to trade talk, to set up a little bridge. Leroy had wanted to talk to Steve and make him see how wrong it was to do a man's thing with a woman in a boy's way with a girl—to take a country girl under his body that way without caring about her or her family or what she might one day have been back in her own backwoods part of the world if just *he* had never come along. —Oh, Leroy reckoned he would have shot some fire, all right! But Leroy always got along with boys and he was sure that with this one he would have made him see it all. He knew himself pretty well, so he figured no one else was much of a reach for him to get to. Leroy was sure that Steve would have ended up letting her be and still been better off for coming to see it in the man's way Leroy would have fished out of him. In a talk Steve would

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never need to hear now, from anyone. That little old bridge to him would never even get started.

Finished, he sat back. There was not a thing he would dare do about that head. He attached the guy line to the stretcher to keep it from banging around on the way to the top. He started to tie on Steve's helmet, but decided that he would just leave it lay, right where it was, forever. Then Leroy stood and signalled *up*.

He held his line firm and watched after the stretcher, dented now with the sleeping weight which would, Leroy was afraid, never awake. Or if so, not to a normal notion of things, which was the same as Christian death so far as Leroy could see.

It was to worry Leroy all that mean day that nothing he *had* done down there would probably make much difference in anything, but that just a blame-fool few words at the right time, a few weeks after maybe some different sort of accident, might have made a lot of things straighter and clearer for the boy, and for a little girl Leroy loved. Leroy reckoned that it was probably always like that with dying, that life ended off in the dark when just one more thing learned in light might have done a lot of good all over the place.

Leroy shrugged and climbed into the bowline nooses—a shrug-off of it all for right now. He lit him a cigaret. Anyway, he told himself, just to cap it off neat and cold, maybe they had a new drug that would send Steve off happy and smooth as a fumy motor with a good ring job on it. Leroy hoped so, vaguely, but it was the sort of miracle it never seemed wisdom to think about. It even seemed sort of beside the point.

"As for Steve, Sally May, consider this—consider it for your own use: can anyone be universally liked if he knows either very much about people or very much about himself—his *self,* I mean? —I think not, dear. Such insights preclude the popular personality, because it tends to like just about everything and everyone without distinction. This has been Steve's trouble, I judge, and it is a silly trouble. He simply hasn't been enough aware of the important matters for a lad of his gifts, and he's been too much concerned with amassing a list of childish superlatives. He still likes to beat others, you see. Yet, it would be a good bit worse if he were older, and I have reason to believe that he is over most

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of it. I do admit that he isn't self-satisfied and now I realize that whatever danger there might have been has passed. And besides," she laughed, "he is only nineteen."

"Well, I don't know," Sally May said, involved suddenly by the heat of resentment and the chill of bewilderment, not thinking, not even hearing, but struggling, each word an attempt to act and each, so far, a failure. "Everybody I know thinks Steve is *very* mature."

"In the sense which you mean, yes, dear, I think probably Steve is."

This silence was long.

"Mrs. Whiting," Sally May took her big breath, "I just think Steve is way ahead of—of where you think he is."

Mrs. Whiting paused and smiled. "I do hope so, dear."

She leaned forward. "But however much you might continue to see Steve, Sally May," she deliberately referred to them as a couple for the first time, "I hope you do not at this juncture in your life place too great an importance upon the transitory."

She grasped Sally May by the hand. "I hope, dear—oh, I do so hope, Sally May!—that you will try very, very hard to find your own version of these matters. Your own authenticity. That is exactly what we all must do, for it is the only search that counts."

Sally May glared. She ached to see this woman crack, to be forced to deal with Steve-and-her as an open fact.

Mrs. Whiting went on. "You see, Sally May, a mother cannot very well teach her son that being liked by people is not understanding them, that popularity is no sign of personal, inner success, or that being well-adjusted is hardly an utmost standard—certainly not for a thinking gentleman. A mother cannot teach those matters because they are not part of a boy's world. The best that a mother can hope for is that one day—or evening—" she could not help inserting, "she will simply realize that her boy has found his first, slight power to choose responsibility, like a man."

"Yes'm. But Steve and I—"

"Oh, would you care for that last sandwich, honey? Please go ahead and take it, if you like. The country ham is really quite good, isn't it?"

The contortion preceded the shout.

"He's way ahead of you, I tell you!" Sally May's fists tightened:

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her face was grim with hurt, her hard eyes slightly softened by brimming tears.

"Perhaps, Sally May," Mrs. Whiting said softly, "you do not recognize these qualities in Steve because you are young enough to admire those others so much."

"I know him! I know him better than anyone."

"Yes, yes, child, I know!" She patted the girl's hand and pushed into words that old, first irony of the evening. "You do care for Steve very much, don't you, dear?"

Sally May's eyes fell and she nodded. Then she straightened herself. —Not this trap, she thought, not again. She pulled her hands away in a clutch upon her lap.

"Steve loves me! We love each other. We've been having an affair *all* year in case you're interested, right in this house in his bed, too, and we're going to get *mar*ried. We're going to get married this spring, and *then* you'll see how much a man he is!"

Mrs. Whiting sighed. "Well, we all have a lot to learn, don't we, Sally May?"

"*You*. Not me."

"I didn't know Steve had been able to afford a ring." Mrs. Whiting's course now was cold and deliberate. She could achieve no warmth once standards were dissolved by outburst.

"Rings aren't important. It's real love that—"

"Of course they aren't, Sally May. But I did think that one would be important to you. A rather large one, wouldn't it be?"

"Well, it isn't important, so you don't know everything after all."

Mrs. Whiting's laugh was almost her earlier trill again.

"Indeed, it would seem that I know very little, wouldn't it?" She paused. "Tell me, Sally May, just when did Steve propose to you?"

"None of all that matters! You're just trying to show me up. Make me squirm, like you have all night. Because you don't like me. But Steve and I—"

"Hush, Sally May." Mrs. Whiting sat as quietly as her voice. "You hush. Right now."

Mrs. Whiting was relieved. She had not been mistaken.

That she was also disappointed, in herself, in this failed clarification, did not especially bother Mrs. Whiting. She had watched

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for light and she remained in darkness; that was all. That so much had gone wrong could only have been expected from an encounter between such an ineffectual woman and such an utter mess of a child. Strangely, she was entirely at ease again, once more safe within her old compassionate, distant, and protected self—permanently within her complete, refined control—back where she had been before Sally May Campbell had entered the parlor with that unconscious and overwhelming appeal for help of hers. Once more she was in absolute, comfortable control of her own rather limited universe. It was a barely satisfactory one, but the one she could comprehend.

Also for Sally May, she realized, had the evening's several significant moments flamed and, like the swampfire of Mrs. Whiting's childhood, disappeared into her young midnight, before either of them had been able to follow, touch, or capture them.

It was over: the same night remained. The wall before her stood, still hardly glimpsed and as unclimbable, as immovable, as it had been that first moment of casual talk upon the cliché of race when she had first sensed it there before them: *"I'm probably all wrong but I just don't care,"* Sally May had said, and Mrs. Whiting had not listened, had not believed that such words could possibly have been central and true.

Sally May was a child, would always be a child. Mrs. Whiting had addressed her throughout the evening as an equal and so had extended to Sally May not understanding but confusion, not aid but quiet ruin.

The only other lesson—and the only fact—which she had learned that night had lain in Sally May's annoyed assurance that Steve had attempted to discuss the same matters with this youngster, that he might very well indeed be "way ahead" of his mother. It was the sort of insight youth itself could only be correct about. This alone, Mrs. Whiting knew—all other intentions and efforts stranded upon the immediate past—would make the evening worth a later perusal.

"If Steve wishes to marry you," she said, "that is his affair, finally, after he has finished school, in—let's see—five or six years. But frankly, dear, I doubt that he will even be sleeping with you after this."

And with that remark, Mrs. Whiting enjoyed a wry though

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astonishing pride in her son's maleness, that he had obtained from Sally May all that he wanted from her—all that she was good for, to a boy of any complex promise—without lessening himself within an adolescent's false love and even while using her to discover for himself the comparative triviality of sex whenever shared without a more meaningful exchange. Nineteen was old enough, she understood now, for a boy not destined to remain a boy for the usual next ten years. Old enough to take any Sally May to bed.

"We're of age!" Sally May stood, her voice again approaching a scream—one of the many human sounds, Mrs. Whiting reflected abstractly, which that room had never heard. "You can't stop us! *You* couldn't stop anything."

"Your criticism of me is almost accurate. But we shall never give our consent, Sally May. Neither will your parents, should I be forced to write them. And without consent, you'll stop yourself, I rather think. I really can't imagine you commuting by subway to some Boston shop and living in a furnished room, Sally May, reading your magazines all evening while Steve studies."

Mrs. Whiting also rose. "No, dear, I really can't see Steve marrying you at all. But why not ask him, since he hasn't asked you? When he returns from his cave trip, you must let me know what he says."

"I won't stay! I'll call a taxi and go to the Andrew Jackson tonight and see him downtown tomorrow evening. Maybe he'll just decide to stay over Christmas Eve with *me,* Mrs. Whiting!"

Mrs. Whiting nodded. "Oh, I don't think I'll even trouble to forbid it, Sally May."

"If *I* want him to," the trash-of-a-smile was there again, "Steve will. You'll see."

"Well, perhaps he will, at that. You are a pretty girl, Sally May, and probably—how do they put it these days?" she smiled "—a pushover. Aren't you, dear?"

Mrs. Whiting turned to leave, then stopped. Behind her, Sally May had collapsed in tears. Into the Hepplewhite chair.

Mrs. Whiting returned and faced her. Her slight, soft body was tense. She grasped Sally May by the shoulders and urged her to her feet.

Sally May wept. Suddenly, she wailed and sought Mrs. Whiting's arms.

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"Don't you do that!" Mrs. Whiting stepped back from the girl, to leave her loosely erect. The Joan Crawford movies were still Sally May's foolish model, of course; but they, she saw now, were not to blame. Her emptiness—it was so amazing!—*was* her only authenticity.

Astonished, Sally May's tears trickled off in a spasm of sniffs and chokes.

"Please, let me apolo—"

"Nonsense. I have no sympathy for you, Sally May. Not because of anything you have done or anything you haven't managed, certainly not because of your silly hope to marry Steve. —No, I have no sympathy for *you*. Do you think you can understand me that well?"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Whiting. I've acted just *aw*ful! I don't know what got . . ." Sally May trailed off, suddenly aware of Mrs. Whiting's full and sardonic contempt.

"Indeed, you have. You have acted quite badly, child. But it is correct for you to be here when Steve comes home. It will be up to you to settle these absurdities between you. You are Steve's guest, not mine, and you are welcome here as long as you consider yourself to be his guest, and as long as Steve wishes your company in his home."

She paused. "One more thing, Sally May. Don't worry about my talking to Steve about this until you've seen him and gone. In fact, I'm not sure I'll ever bother."

Sally May stood, crushed and shaking, desperate beyond the circumstance, every ugly insight she had ever locked away loosed upon her, hungry and sneering. The beautiful room, this lady, that gentle talk she had found so annoying—these mocked her, these snickered as though she were standing nude on Church Street.

She failed at her last smile. "Mrs. Whiting," she tried again, "wouldn't you please forgive me? Wouldn't you please just try to forget all this and let us, sort of, start over?"

"Of course not." Mrs. Whiting rang the bell for Mabel.

"I just meant that since it *is* Christmas, and—"

Mrs. Whiting smiled. "You had better go to your room, now, Sally May. Tomorrow we shall conduct ourselves as though nothing had happened, of course. But don't you forget this: it did."

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"I couldn't help it, Mrs. Whiting."

"Neither of us could help it—any of it, Sally May."

They were a tableau while the phone rang, each looking first at slender gold watches marked at one-thirty, each shifting a stare to that other, time-transforming instrument.

Mrs. Whiting went to the corner table near the door where Sally May stood. She picked up the phone, murmured "Yes?" and listened.

"I see," she said finally. "Thank you, Lieutenant," She hung up.

"It was the State Police in Sutter City. Steve has had an accident, Sally May. Serious, I suspect. I'll get Paul while you're packing. We'll leave immediately."

"Packing?" Sally May stood stupefied, dazed beyond speech. She noticed that Mrs. Whiting was staring frankly at the doorknob, where her hand still rested heavily.

She stepped aside, the hand dropping like meat to her side. But as Mrs. Whiting stepped swiftly into the hall Sally May caught her arm by the elbow.

"Mrs. Whiting, I appreciate your asking me to go. . . . Maybe this will—"

Mrs. Whiting eased from the grasp. "We'll drop you off at the Andrew Jackson on the way, dear," she said. "Steve probably won't be home for a while, you see."

Sally May watched after Mrs. Whiting as she climbed the dim stairs, a stiff, awakening power to her step. When she rounded the landing and disappeared into the darkness, Sally May turned from the door upon the bright and lonely emptiness of the great hall. So much, so very much, had one night ripened and concluded for her, for them all. Sally May did not care how foolish she seemed, or was. She touched Steve's ring once more, but only for an instant, as if shocked. Her love was a bleak and terrible burden now, and winter and loss were heavy upon her heart.

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WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

The Dance

1

When the snow falls the flakes
spin upon the long axis
that concerns them most intimately
two and two to make a dance

the mind dances with itself,
taking you by the hand,
your lover follows
there are always two,

yourself and the other,
the point of your shoe setting the pace,
if you break away and run
the dance is over

2

Breathlessly you will take
another partner
better or worse who will keep
at your side, at your stops

whirl and glide until he too
leave off
on his way down as if
there were another direction

gayer, more carefree
spinning face to face but always down
with each other secure
only in each other's arms

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3

But only the dance is sure!
make it your own.
Who can tell
what is to come of it?

in the woods of your
own nature whatever
twig interposes, and bare twigs
have an actuality of their own

this flurry of the storm
that holds us,
plays with us and discards us
dancing, dancing as may be credible.

Jersey Lyric

view of winter trees
before
one tree

in the foreground
where
by freshfallen

snow
lie 7 woodchunks ready
for the fire

The Woodthrush

fortunate man it is not too late
the woodthrush
flies into my garden

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before the snow
he looks at me silent without
moving

his dappled breast reflecting
tragic winter
thoughts my love my own

He has beaten about the bush long enough

What a team
Flossie, Mary, a chemistry prof
and I

make to confront
the
slowly hardening

brain
of an academician
The most

that can be said
for it
is

that it has the crystal-
ine pattern
of

new ice on
a country
pool

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ROBERT LOWELL

William Carlos Williams

DR. WILLIAMS AND HIS WORK are part of me, yet I come on them them as a critical intruder. I fear I shall spoil what I have to say, just as I somehow got off on the wrong note about Williams with Ford Madox Ford twenty-five years ago. Ford was wearing a stained robin's-egg blue pajama top, reading Theocritus in Greek, and guying me about my "butterfly existence," so removed from the labors of a professional writer. I was saying something awkward, green and intense in praise of Williams, and Ford, while agreeing, managed to make me feel that I was far too provincial, genteel and puritanical to understand what I was saying. And why not? Wasn't I, as Ford assumed, the grandson or something of James Russell Lowell and the cousin of Lawrence Lowell, a young man doomed to trifle with poetry and end up as President of Harvard or ambassador to England?

I have stepped over these pitfalls. I have conquered my hereditary disadvantages. Except for writing, nothing I've touched has shone. When I think about writing on Dr. Williams, I feel a chaos of thoughts and images, images cracking open to admit a thought, thoughts dragging their roots for the soil of an image. When I woke up this morning, something unusual for this summer was going on!—pinpricks of rain were falling in a reliable, comforting simmer. Our town was blanketed in the rain of rot and the rain of renewal. New life was muscling in, everything growing moved on its one-way trip to the ground. I could feel this, yet believe our universal misfortune was bearable and even welcome. An image held my mind during these moments and kept returning—an old fashioned New England cottage freshly painted white. I saw a shaggy, triangular shade on the house, trees, a hedge, or their shadows, the blotch of decay. The house might have been the house I was now living in, but it wasn't; it came from the time when I was a child, still unable to read and living in the small town of Barnstable on Cape Cod. Inside the house was a birdbook with an old stiff and steely engraving of a sharp-shinned hawk. The hawk's legs had a reddish brown buffalo fuzz on them; behind was the blue sky, bare and abstracted from the world. In the

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present, pinpricks of rain were falling on everything I could see, and even on the white house in my mind, but the hawk's picture, being indoors I suppose, was more or less spared. Since I saw the picture of the hawk, the pinpricks of rain have gone on, half the people I once knew are dead, half the people I now know were then unborn, and I have learned to read.

An image of a white house with a blotch on it—this is perhaps the start of a Williams poem. If I held this image closely and honestly enough, the stabbing detail might come and with it the universal that belonged to this detail and nowhere else. Much wrapping would have to be cut away, and many elegiac cadences with their worn eloquence and loftiness. This is how I would like to write about Dr. Williams. I would collect impressions, stare them into rightness, and let my mind-work and judgments come as they might naturally.

When I was a freshman at Harvard, nothing hit me so hard as the Norton Lectures given by Robert Frost. Frost's revolutionary power, however, was not in his followers, or in the student literary magazine, the *Advocate,* whose editor had just written a piece on speech rhythms in the "Hired Man," a much less up-to-date thing to do then than now. Our only strong and avant-garde man was James Laughlin. He was much taller and older than we were. He knew Henry Miller, and exotic young American poetesses in Paris, spent summers at Rapallo with Ezra Pound, and was getting out the first number of his experimental annual, *New Directions.* He knew the great, and he himself wrote deliberately flat descriptive and anecdotal poems. We were sarcastic about them, but they made us feel secretly that we didn't know what was up in poetry. They used no punctuation or capitals, and their only rule was that each line should be eleven or fifteen typewriter spaces long. The author explained that this metric was "as rational as any other" and was based on the practice of W. C. Williams, a poet and pediatrician living in Rutherford, New Jersey. About this time, Laughlin published a review somewhere, perhaps even in the *Harvard Advocate,* of Williams' last small volume. In it, he pushed the metric of typewriter spaces, and quoted from a poem, "The Catholic Bells," to show Williams' "mature style at fifty!" This was a memorable phrase, and one that made maturity seem possible, but a long way off. I more or less memorized "The Catholic Bells," and spent months trying to

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console myself by detecting immaturities in whatever Williams had written before he was fifty.

THE CATHOLIC BELLS

Tho' I'm not Catholic
I listen hard when the bells
in the yellow brick tower
of their new church

ring down the leaves
ring in the frost upon them
and the death of the flowers
ring out the grackle

toward the south, the sky
darkened by them, ring in
the new baby of Mr. and Mrs.
Krantz which cannot

for the fat of it cheeks
open well its eyes . . .

What I liked about "The Catholic Bells" were the irrelevant associations I hung on the words "frost" and "Catholic," and still more its misleading similarity to the "Ring out wild bells" section of *In Memoriam*. Other things upset and fascinated me and made me feel I was in a world I would never quite understand. Were the spelling "Tho," strange in a realistic writer, and the iambic rhythm of the first seven words part of some inevitable sound pattern? I had dipped into Edith Sitwell's criticism and was full of inevitable sound patterns. I was sure that somewhere hidden was a key that would make this poem as regular as the regular meters of Tennyson. There had to be something outside the poem I could hang onto because what was inside dizzied me! the shocking scramble of the august and the crass in making the Catholic church "new" and "yellow brick," the cherubic ugliness of the baby, belonging rather horribly to "Mr. and Mrs. / Krantz," and seen by the experienced, mature pediatrician as unable to see "for the fat of its cheeks"—this last a cunning shift into anapests. I was surprised that Williams used commas, and that my three or four methods of adjusting his lines to uniform typewriter spaces

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failed. I supposed he had gone on to some bolder and still more mature system.

To explain the full punishment I felt on first reading Williams, I should say a little about what I was studying at the time. A year or so before, I had read some introductory books on the enjoyment of poetry, and was knocked over by the examples in the free verse sections. When I arrived at college, independent, fearful of advice and with all the world before me, I began to rummage through the Cambridge bookshops. I found books that must have been looking for a buyer since the student days of Trumbull Stickney: soiled metrical treatises written by obscure English professors in the eighteen-nineties. They were full of glorious things: rising rhythm, falling rhythm, feet with Greek names, stanzas from Longfellow's *Psalm of Life,* John Drinkwater and Swinburne. Nothing seemed simpler than meter. I began experiments with an exotic foot, short, long, two shorts, then fell back on iambics. My material now took twice as many words, and I rolled out Spenserian stanzas on Job and Jonah surrounded by recently seen Nantucket scenery. Everything I did was grand, ungrammatical and had a timeless, hackneyed quality. All this was ended by reading Williams. It was as though some homemade ship, part Spanish galleon, part paddle-wheels, kitchen pots and elastic bands and worked by hand, had anchored to a filling station.

In the "Catholic Bells," the joining of religion and non-religion, of piety and a hard, nervous secular knowingness are typical of Williams. Further along in this poem, there is a piece of mere description that has always stuck in my mind.

> (the
> grapes still hanging to
> the vines along the nearby
> *Concordia Halle* like broken
> teeth in the head of an
> old man)

Take out the *Concordia Halle* and the grape vines crackle in the wind with a sour, impoverished dryness; take out the vines and the *Concordia Halle* has lost its world. Williams has pages and pages of description that are as good as this. It is his equivalent of, say, the Miltonic sentence, the dazzling staple and excellence which he can always produce. Williams has said that he uses the

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forms he does for quick changes of tone, atmosphere and speed. This makes him dangerous and difficult to imitate, because most poets have little change of tone, atmosphere and speed in them.

I have emphasized Williams' simplicity and nakedness and have no doubt been misleading. His idiom comes from many sources, from speech and reading, both of various kinds; the blend, which is his own invention, is generous and even exotic. Few poets can come near to his wide clarity and dashing rightness with words, his dignity and almost Alexandrian modulations of voice. His short lines often speed up and simplify hugely drawn out and ornate sentence structures. I once typed out his direct but densely observed poem, "The Semblables," in a single prose paragraph. Not a word or its placing had been changed, but the poem had changed into a piece of smothering, magnificent rhetoric, much more like Faulkner than the original Williams.

The difficulties I found in Williams twenty-five years ago are still difficulties for me. Williams enters me, but I cannot enter him. Of course, one cannot catch any good writer's voice or breathe his air. But there's something more. It's as if no poet except Williams had really seen America or heard its language. Or rather, he sees and hears what we all see and hear and what is most obvious, but no one else has found this a help or an inspiration. This may come naturally to Dr. Williams from his character, surroundings and occupation. I can see him rushing from his practice to his typewriter, happy that so much of the world has rubbed off on him, maddened by its hurry. Perhaps he had no choice. Anyway, what others have spent lifetimes in building up personal styles to gather what has been snatched up on the run by Dr. Williams? When I say that I cannot enter him, I am almost saying that I cannot enter America. This troubles me. I am not satisfied to let it be. Like others I have picked up things here and there from Williams, but this only makes me marvel all the more at his unique and searing journey. It is a Dantesque journey, for he loves America excessively, as if it were *the* truth and *the* subject; his exasperation is also excessive, as if there were no other hell. His flowers rustle by the superhighways and pick up all our voices.

A seemingly unending war has been going on for as long as I can remember between Williams and his disciples and the principals and disciples of another school of modern poetry. The

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"beats" are on one side, the university poets are on the other. Lately the gun-fire has been hot. With such unlikely Williams recruits as Karl Shapiro blasting away, it has become unpleasant to stand in the middle in a position of impartiality.

The war is an old one for me. In the late Thirties, I was at Kenyon College to study under John Crowe Ransom. The times hummed with catastrophe and ideological violence, both political and aesthetical. The English departments were clogged with worthy, but out-worn and backward-looking scholars, whose tastes in the moderns were most often superficial, random and vulgar. Students who wanted to write got little practical help from their professors. They studied the classics as monsters that were slowly losing their fur and feathers and leaking a little sawdust. What one did one's self was all chance and shallowness, and no profession seemed wispier and less needed than that of the poet. My own group, that of Tate and Ransom, was all for the high discipline, for putting on the full armor of the past, for making poetry something that would take a man's full weight and that would bear his complete intelligence, passion and subtlety. Almost anything, the Greek and Roman classics, Elizabethan dramatic poetry, 17th century metaphysical verse, old and modern critics, aestheticians and philosophers, could be suppled up and again made necessary. The struggle perhaps centered on making the old metrical forms usable again to express the depths of one's experience.

For us Williams was of course part of the revolution that had renewed poetry, but he was a byline. Opinions varied on his work. It was something fresh, secondary and minor, or it was the best that free verse could do. He was the one writer with the substance, daring and staying power to make the short free verse poem something considerable. One was shaken when the radical conservative critic, Yvor Winters, spoke of Williams' "By the road to the contagious hospital" as a finer, more lasting piece of craftsmanship than "Gerontion."

Well, nothing will do for everyone. It's hard for me to see how I and the younger poets I was close to could at that time have learned much from Williams. It was all we could do to keep alive and follow our own heavy program. That time is gone, and now young poets are perhaps more conscious of the burden and the hardening of this old formalism. Too many poems have been writ-

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ten to rule. They show off their authors' efforts and mind, but little more. Often the culture seems to have passed them by. And once more, Dr. Williams is a model and a liberator. What will come, I don't know. Williams, unlike, say, Marianne Moore, seems to be one of those poets who can be imitated anonymously. His style is almost a common style and even what he claims for it—*the American style*. Somehow written without his speed and genius, the results are usually dull, a poem at best well-made but without breath.

Williams is part of the great breath of our literature. *Paterson* is our *Leaves of Grass*. The times have changed. A drastic experimental art is now expected and demanded. The scene is dense with the dirt and power of industrial society. Williams looks on it with exasperation, terror and a kind of love. His short poems are singularly perfect thrusts, maybe the best that will ever be written of their kind, because neither the man nor the pressure will be found again. When I think of his last longish autobiographical poems, I remember his last reading I heard. It was at Wellesley. I think about three thousand students attended. It couldn't have been more crowded in the wide-galleried hall and I had to sit in the aisle. The poet appeared, one whole side partly paralysed, his voice just audible, and here and there a word misread. No one stirred. In the silence he read his great poem, "Of Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," a triumph of simple confession—somehow he delivered to us what was impossible, something that was both poetry and beyond poetry.

I think of going with Dr. Williams and his son to visit his mother, very old, almost a hundred, and unknowing, her black eyes boring through. And Williams saying to her, "Which would you rather see, us, or three beautiful blonds?" As we left, he said, "The old bitch will live on but I may die tomorrow!" You could not feel shocked. Few men had felt and respected anyone more than Williams had his old mother. And in seeing him out strolling on a Sunday after a heart attack: the town seemed to know him and love him and take him in its stride, as we will do with his great pouring of books, his part in the air we breathe and will breathe.

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DENIS DONOGHUE

Poetry and the Behaviour of Speech

> Forsomuch as (in mine opinion) wryting is nothing els, but a maner of speach, that remaineth still after a man hath spoken, or (as it were) an image, or rather the life of the wordes.
>
> —*"Il Libro del Cortegiano"; Englished by Sir Thomas Hoby.*

We will think of Paul Valéry, a poet who would have been happier as a composer. In *Fragments des mémoires d'un Poème* Valéry envies the musician "grappling with a vast page of twenty staves," ordering his calculations of tempo and form on a ruled field, really able to compose, conceive, and handle both the whole and the detail of his undertaking, to "move from one to the other and note their mutual dependence." The act seems sublime; Valéry speaks of it as one would register the thrill of an act in symbolic logic, the sheer beauty and freedom of it. And he laments that such joys are not available to the poet, "owing to the nature of language and to the habits of mind resulting from its permanent, practical function. . . ."[1] The lament is that of an exemplary modern poet, committed to words and embarrassed by their vulgar importunities. To Valéry it seems that Language is twisting the poet's arm, forcing him to acknowledge a crude, rough function which does not chime with his own high ideal. The modern poet fears that Language by its very nature is forcing him to express not the pure Self but such gritty matter as ideas, perhaps even convictions. If words could be held apart, one could easily control them, but they have a bourgeois hankering to rush together in closed formulations and statements. Common syntax is like a spring; if you disapprove of its direction you must use force to change it. Valéry is a typical poet of his time in resenting the syntactical ghost which undermines the writer's freedom. The writer, he seems to advise, must use all his sceptical intelligence to thwart this demon, twisting it into configurations from which there is no 'practical' escape.

[1] THE ART OF POETRY, by *Paul Valéry*. Translated by *Denise Foliot*. London. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958. pp. 122-3.

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If convictions are undesirable or misleading, one must find ways to deflect the blow of language. There are several possibilities. One can pretend to take ideas and convictions seriously while merely using them as grist. (T. S. Eliot has delineated Valéry thus: "the very adult mind playing with ideas because it was too sceptical to hold convictions." Pater's entire fiction is the exploitation of this stance, enriched with remarkably picturesque detail.) One can deny commitment in the words by locating expressiveness in the 'presence' which is the form; in the *being* of the poem as a force mysteriously superior to its *meaning*. One can glorify the 'uselessness' of Art. One can try to deflect the reader's attention from the stubborn reference of the words. One can push poetry further and further from its own condition toward the condition of music: thus, as in Valéry's poetic, music serves as pastoral, a mode of experience in which the crude recalcitrance of the practical world is controlled, dissolved. Like the white spaces on Mallarmé's page.

This is the point of intersection between French poetry and German philosophy in the nineteenth century. Schopenhauer, near the end of the third Book, "The World as Idea," glorifies music as being entirely independent of the phenomenal world. Indeed, he says, music could to a certain extent exist if there were no phenomenal world at all. Music is as direct an objectification of the whole will as the world itself. The composer reveals the inner nature of the world and expresses the deepest wisdom in a language which his reason does not understand. This is precisely the condition implied in Valéry's poetic, a condition of ultimate expressiveness without commitment, in which the poet would not be responsible to his reason, though he would employ it freely—almost fanatically—in studying the fascinating process of expression. The musician, Valéry says, can work upon a number of possibilities "without any reference to the world of things and people." His structures resemble nothing that exists, and "tend to group themselves into self-sufficient compositions."

In this condition, we would argue, the essential event is the release of the Will. When Nietzsche drew the birth of Tragedy from the spirit of music, he said that one cannot deduce the tragic from the nature of art as this is ordinarily conceived "according to the single category of appearance and beauty." It is only through the spirit of music that we understand the joy in the annihilation of

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the individual. For in the particular examples of such annihilation only is the eternal phenomenon of Dionysian art made clear to us, "which gives expression to the will in its omnipotence, as it were, behind the *principium individuationis,* the eternal life beyond all phenomena, and in spite of all annihilations." It is a famous passage. In the present context it reminds us that at a time when the Will—at once 'angelic' and predatory—was being more and more thoroughly released from the restraint of mind, and from the more primitive restraints of piety and reverence, the European psyche turned to music as the uniquely fitting power for the enactment of this release. Thus poets envied the composer his power to liberate himself from the finite, to ignore the phenomenal world, to opt out of statement and *mimesis.* And around this envy a cluster of motives forms; the rejection of pious linkages, anarchism, religion as blasphemy, music as pastoral, idealism, alienation, art for art's sake, the Satanism of Sense, man as blond beast, the decline of the hero, pure poetry, ideology as entertainment and pageantry. Mann's Leverkühn abandons theology in favour of music.

Thinking again of Valéry, we note his tendency to assimilate poetry to music rather than to speech; his location of poetry not in communication, statement, knowledge, or rhetoric, but in 'the poetic state.' This state is too pure to tolerate tainted matter; there is a fantastic passage in *Questions de Poésie* in which Valéry speaks against "the influence of the theatre and of dramatic poetry (that is, of *action,* which is essentially *prose.*)" Thus at one stroke he eliminates human acts and motives from the severe paradise of poetry. And why not, since he resents the fact that we are creatures of habit, more especially the habit of our language, which is—quite simply—other people? Valéry testifies that in reading certain poetic works he was ravished by their "remoteness from man," a remoteness from everything born of our statistical relations with our fellows and of our "necessary, and necessarily impure, commerce with the monotonous disorder of external life." In 1889 he spoke of his love for the art of his age, "complicated and *artificial,* too vibrant, too tense, too *musical,* and all the more as it becomes more mysterious, narrower, more inaccessible to the crowd." Hence the poem is preserved ground, fenced off from the prose-matter of the market-place. The poet is a maker of 'deviations':

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since the language of the gods should be as distinct as possible from the language of men, all means of differentiating it should be retained so long as they also conduce to harmony. Besides, speech changes: if we make the poem an isolated object, intransitive, we free it to some extent from the caprice of speech, and its self-sufficiency is more than enough to placate us for any possible loss in companionship. We may therefore cut the language of poetry clean away from "the common system of exchanging signs for acts or ideas."

What Valéry resisted most strenuously was the tendency of Words as Signs to invade his preserved ground of poetry. He argued that when we use words as signs, we desire that the words will disappear as soon as they have been comprehended. We say the words, our auditor hears them and then replaces them in his own mind by relationships, impulses, motives (i.e. non-language). This is success. But the language of the poetic universe, according to Valéry, is quite different: here the words assert themselves, make themselves respected and even desired. They refuse to be dissolved. When we are engrossed with them, "we are insensibly transformed and ready to live, breathe, and think in accordance with a rule and under laws which are no longer of the practical order—that is, nothing that may occur in this state will be resolved, finished, or abolished by a specific act." The poetic universe, as distinct from "the universe of experiences and acts," is a universe of reciprocal relations as in music. Resonance triumphs over causality. The words, Valéry seems to say, are symbolic vessels rather than signs.

Valéry is not a systematic critic; to find something like his theory of art extended and elaborated with impressive detail we should have to go to the writings of Susanne Langer, beginning with *Philosophy in a New Key*. This would bring us far afield. But the correspondences between Mrs. Langer's *Problems of Art* and Valéry's poetic are too striking to ignore. For Mrs. Langer the poetic use of words is not essentially communicative; poetry is not discourse at all. What the poet creates is a shaped apparition of a new human experience: not a report or comment, but a constructed form; if it is a good poetic work it is an *expressive form* in the same way that a work of plastic art is an expressive form—by virtue of the tensions and resolutions, balances and asymmetries

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among its own elements, which beget the illusion of organic nature which artists call 'living form.'[2] The poet's purpose is "the creation of a self-contained, pure appearance, a perceptible expressive form." *Poesis* is to be sharply distinguished from *mimesis:* in the poem actual events, if they enter its orbit at all, are *motifs* of poetry, as actual objects are motifs of painting. One can most profitably discuss poetry precisely as one discusses music.

The unmistakable trend of Mrs. Langer's theory is to withdraw the entire philosophical weight of any statements or propositions which she finds in a poem, leaving a rhythmic semblance which is closely related to some universal human feeling, but quite free from the commitment of idea or statement. For instance, in reading the famous anthology song from *Pippa Passes* she senses that the lines are like the structure of a ship's roll-call, and she is then in a position to enjoy them as "the perfect abstraction of feeling"; but she can entertain them only when she has thus drained off their specific reference. This is her invariable method of reading a poem; to dissolve all specific reference, ignore any dramatic situation, and then find that the words are the 'expressive form' of some universal human feeling—thus eliminating the gritty matter. At that point she enjoys the discovered semblance in terms of rhythms, harmonies, asymmetries, and balances.

Suppose we try it:

> Wrapt up, O Lord, in mans degeneration;
> The glories of thy truth, thy joyes eternall,
> Reflect upon my soule darke desolation,
> And ugly prospects o're the sprites infernall.
> Lord, I have sinn'd, and mine iniquity,
> Deserves this hell; yet Lord deliver me.
>
> Thy power and mercy never comprehended,
> Rest lively imag'd in my Conscience wounded;
> Mercy to grace, and power to feare extended,
> Both infinite, and I in both confounded;
> Lord, I have sinned, and mine iniquity,
> Deserves this hell, yet Lord deliver me.

[2] PROBLEMS OF ART, by *Susanne K. Langer*. London. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957. pp. 148 foll.

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If from this depth of sinne, this hellish grave,
And fatall absence from my Saviours glory,
I could implore his mercy, who can save,
And for my sinnes, not paines of sinne, be sorry:
Lord, from this horror of iniquity,
And hellish grave, thou wouldst deliver me.[3]

Mrs. Langer's theory seems bloodless when we put it beside this poem. If we want the richness of the poem, do we not approach it by involving ourselves in an imagined I-Thou situation between the speaker and his God? This means taking seriously what is being said, moment by moment, in words which are counters but none the worse for being so. It involves conceding to the words their full vitality in the public world, not merely as open motifs or musical notes. Giving our assent to the dramatic situation, to the dialogue, we are free to register the balances, tensions, and asymmetries, but these—I should argue—as formative elements in a unique discourse, contributing to its identity. Thus the second part of each stanza is a new scene in the drama, rhythmically defined—if you like—and issuing in the firm avowal of the last phrase. If we read the poem as music, we become perhaps more responsive to the propriety of the phrasing, and it will do us no harm to recognize that the Latinical density at the end of each line is 'like' the full articulation at the end of a phrase in an Elizabethan madrigal. But this becomes vicious if it means taking "yet Lord deliver me" as a waft of rhythm, or a *form,* apart from the specific human prayer—the gesture—in which alone the form or the rhythm is realized. The prayer itself is the 'ground of our beseeching.' R. P. McKeon has advised us, in an entirely different context, that the practical criticism of poetry in the present century has emphasized linguistic devices "but at the expense of separating language from what language expresses."[4] Valéry courts this rebuke; so does Mrs. Langer.

Most of Valéry's poetic seems perverse, and one is tempted to write it off as a period piece; but it is my impression that at least one fragment of it has passed into our general sense of poetry with-

[3] POEMS AND DRAMAS OF FULKE GREVILLE, edited by *Geoffrey Bullough.* London. Oliver and Boyd, 1939. I, 143. Sonnet XCVIII.

[4] THOUGHT, ACTION, AND PASSION, by *R. P. McKeon.* University of Chicago Press, 1954. p. 221.

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out being adequately examined. This is his reductive view of Words as Signs. Really, there is no good reason for denigrating signs: what we must ensure is that the signs be—as far as possible—dependable, and that if through history or the 'genius' of the language they have acquired something akin to character or personality, we respond to this. This is our safeguard against the logical positivists. We should be decently aware that words use us almost as much as we use them, but it is enough to be cautious. There is little to gain and much to lose in intensifying a dichotomy between words as signs and words as symbolic vessels, or by protesting that at some theoretical extreme one will be 'purely' neutral and the other 'purely' dense. In fact, there is much to gain by conceding priority to words as signs, *even in the poem*. Let me try to support this.

In response to 'inspired' words one is sometimes tempted to locate the inspiration in the 'breath' of the words themselves, making the poet an enabling instrument or accomplice in the pay of an heuristic language. Thus R. P. Blackmur tells us, in his daring essay on Melville's craft, that "words bring meaning to birth and themselves contained the meaning as an imminent possibility before the pangs of junction." And again: "The reality you labour desperately or luckily to put into your words—and you may put it in consciously like Coleridge or by instinct as in the great ballads or from piety and passion like the translators of the Bible—you will actually have found there, deeply ready and innately formed to give objective being and specific idiom to what you knew and did not know that you knew."[5] The agent is the words, or a ghostly figure who inhabits them and animates them; the agency or instrument is the poet. I fancy Valéry would have agreed. And yet do we gain anything whatever by this reversal? It is a touching acknowledgment, on Mr. Blackmur's part, of the 'mystery' of great literature, but even a mild humanist will protest that the forces involved are those of the person, the writer, endowed with faculties which excite and thrill the listener. The forces are *there,* the poem is disclosed in and through the words which are his instrument. The symbolic imagination is a *human* power, however resistant to analysis or explication. There is no need to push literary discourse incorrigibly beyond the reach of syntax.

[5] THE LION AND THE HONEYCOMB, by *R. P. Blackmur*. London. Methuen, 1956. p. 138.

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Valéry's strategy, when arguing about these matters, was to imply that all discourse based upon words as signs can be exemplified in the situation of one man asking another for a light. Words as symbolic vessels are credited with all kinds of untouchable powers; words as signs are illustrated by imperative grunts. In his urge to separate poetry from all activities except musical composition, Valéry is prepared to lose the whole for the sake of the problematic part. It is surely absurd to suggest that the discourse of the practical world can be reduced to "Give me a light" when it also includes—in a single language—such stylish signwork as Wallace Stevens' essays, Eliot's *The Sacred Wood,* James's critical Prefaces, Ransom's *God without Thunder,* and Bradley's philosophical testament. But we need not be intransigent. We may readily grant that the poem has a notional autonomy, since its only real existence is in and through the words, and if we wrench 'something' apart from the words, we make—at best—a cruder tissue of words which is not the poem but merely our own 'sign' of its existence. But this autonomy is not—as in Valéry's theory—a condition only to be preserved by fending off every other existent in a spirit of rejection and denigration. It is the autonomy of a bridge, separable for as many thoughtful occasions as we wish, but living a gentle life in cogent relation to people, trees, stones, rivers, and houses. We gain nothing by thinking of the poem as a rival construct, cut adrift from the messy world of private and social relationships. If we think of it in that way we merely add yet another antagonism or condescension to those we bear already. Instead, we should think of the poet making his own best order of discourse to set beside the chaos of experience, with this proviso, that the poem's internal energies should flow back into the existential situation. The poem is for man. Hawthorne's "Snow-Image" and "The Artist of the Beautiful" are distinguished representations of the artist's plight in an obtuse society; but our urgent need is to consider the possible continuities between the experience of Owen Warland and that of Peter Hovenden. Valéry's metaphors are divisive, and merely intensify our dichotomies.

Valéry's theory of poetry has not received as much attention as its temptations demand. Mr. Eliot has commented acutely upon a few aspects of it, including the proposed assimilation of poetry to

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music rather than to speech, but his remarks are undermined by his fumbling treatment of the same question in his later lecture on Milton. Mr. Eliot can hardly have it both ways; if he considers —rightly, in my view—that the poem should not stray far from the actual behaviour of speech, then it is worse than useless to say that the remoteness of Milton's verse from speech is "one of the marks of his greatness." Milton's greatness is not in dispute. The question is: are we to register the remoteness of Milton's verse from speech as a defect in *Paradise Lost?* It seems to me inescapably a defect which Bembo's counsel and decorum will perhaps explain, but not justify. (But this is an old crux, and it is impossible to discuss it tactfully in a few brisk sentences.) That the poet should take as his 'means' his own language as it is actually spoken around him; that a poetic revolution is overdue when the gap between current speech and the language of the poem has become considerable; these are Mr. Eliot's postulates in his rhetorical essays.[6] Postulates, not arguments; Mr. Eliot resorts to argument only when he fears that his personal authority is, for the occasion in hand, inadequate.

We would argue that speech is always the proper material for the poem because it provides the only life-line between the poem and the common life of feeling. This common life issues in acts and sufferances, and ultimately in these as formulated in speech. Speech is the most reliable guarantor of feeling, however incessantly we must allow for the 'imperfections' of formulation and for the fact that a great deal of feeling does not issue in speech at all. Speech is therefore the poet's best guide to whatever resources of feeling and action he may share with his presumed readers. These are, I know, unfashionable terms; the entire weight of symbolist and post-symbolist poetry is against them. Many years ago Jacques Rivière pointed out that in a symbolist poem the subject is never an event, a story, or even the description of a soul, the picture of a living being; it is always an emotion completely pure and without cause or roots. And we may add that in such a poetic the actual behaviour of speech would have little or no relevance; a disembodied emotion would speak its own 'language,' if it were to

[6] The most relevant pieces are "Swinburne as Poet" (1920), "Dante" (1929), "Charles Whibley" (1931), "The Music of Poetry" (1942), "The Social Function of Poetry" (1945), "Milton" (1947), "From Poe to Valéry" (1949), and Introduction to Valéry's *The Art of Poetry* (1958).

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speak any. But if the emotion were to take unto itself a body, and thereafter a place, an occasion, and moral valency, it would develop its embodied voice from the manifestations of actual speech. In this happier condition man and his poems would still have problems, but at least it would be possible to envisage a condition in which he would not be tied to mechanistic metaphors of force and aggression. The poems would gain sustenance from their relation to 'the world's body'; in turn, man would acknowledge with delight an image of a possible order in linguistic terms continuous with his own.

In separating the 'prose' of the practical world from the language of poetry Valéry evades the fact that actual speech exhibits a qualitative continuity between the barest notations and the language of religious transport. Continuity, not identity: a man speaks differently on different occasions. But even when one speaks of God, or to Him in prayer, one is committed to the basic terms of familial and social relationships. One may charge these terms with unusual resonance, but one can't evade them; the only lexicon we have is 'humanist.' Creatural speech is therefore the instrument of the most exalted expression. The poet's task is to use the resources of this speech to recover what has been ceded to the scientist in that middle range of experience which is still, at least quantitatively, the greater part of our lives. Poetry does well to have its average moments: thus early critics discerned a Middle Style and praised it, and praised a corresponding mode of behaviour, finding the genial behaviour endorsed by the style. It is not enough; but it is precious. One regrets that some critics value only the shrill extremes of style, just as they seem to value only the fierce extremes of experience.

To draw these matters toward a conclusion, here is a stanza from a modern poem:

> Birds are of passage now,
> Else-wending; where
> (Songless, soon gone of late)
> They night among us,
> No tone now upon grass
> Downcast from hedge or grove
> With goldening day invites.
> Cold, wizening, drear

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Lies there all shadowing over.
Yet some, then many from
The blanched net flit and call,
Still a time gambolling;
Into, from the numb skein,
Two, a third with least tune;
And one on the sunned end
Of lawn turns and turns,
With rime-bedabbled wing.[7]

These are last year's words. Léonie Adams is a fine poet, and she has given us in "Song from a County Fair," "Send Forth the High Falcon," "Many Mansions," and "Those Not Elect" poems which are genuine human discoveries. But "Words for the Raker of Leaves" is very bad. The poem is cast as a meditative lyric, but we cannot believe in it as anyone's meditation. The chime of vowel upon vowel, internal alliteration, the fulsome assonance; these are erected into a purely sonal absolute for the life of the poem; their involvement in local meaning is perfunctory. Diction and syntax combine in minimum specific reference, with maximum effort to enclose the reader in lush opacities of sound. And the linkages of sound are 'pure,' detached from a recognisably human voice. The effect is to attenuate the connexions between speaker, listener, and fictive 'situations'; the relationships are fatally insecure. The source of this insecurity is the shadowiness of the speaker; the words give him (her?) no character, no identity. They do not establish any continuity between the life of the poem and the experience of its listeners. Even the 'voice' is beyond belief. Perhaps the trouble lies in the misgivings of an American poet trying to write 'English' verse—and indeed the sonorities of the poem keep reminding me of another famous sound-track, James Stephens' *The Shell*. This might be William Carlos Williams' explanation, and he could make a strong argument. We need not try to do his work; but we may argue that the defects of Miss Adams' poem are all part of her failure to give her speaker a convincing voice, an identity, a 'place' in time. This failure is the rift between the language of the poem and credible human speech.

We have mentioned Dr. Williams. No poet in our time has

[7] POEMS: A SELECTION, by *Léonie Adams*. Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1954. pp. 13-4.

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placed a higher value upon the flavour of convincing speech. There is nothing 'cute' in this, he is not a tourist. What he values is speech as sign of individual existence, as proof that there is something *there;* speech issuing from a man in a particular place at a particular time and incorporating that place and that time in its tonality. When we think of this we think of the best things in Williams' own work, the reverence for fact, for event, for actions, for history, the sheer commitment to the creatural. Here is a piece torn from *Paterson Five:*

> A flight of birds, all together,
> seeking their nests in the season
> a flock before dawn, small birds
> "That slepen al the night with open Ye,"
> moved by desire, passionately, they
> have come a long way, commonly.
> Now they separate and go by pairs
> each to his appointed mating. The
> colors of their plumage are undecipherable
> in the sun's glare against the sky
> but the old man's mind is stirred
> by the white, the yellow, the black
> as if he could see them there.[8]

And so it goes on. This is poetry as fair speech. It is more American than English, a movement of translucent speech concerned far less with density than with a noiseless progression from one notation to the next. "Passionately" may chime with "commonly," making a point, but Williams doesn't make an opera out of it or ask the reader to stay up half the night to register the beauty of it; he moves along steadily, there is work to be done. The 'genius' of this language does not object if one looks 'through' it to the fictive situation which exists now—in the words—if it never existed before. There is nothing opaque in this verse, no foggy smudge of connotation hiding the thing, the motive, the perception. Chaucer is at home in this verse. Williams knows that a poet purifies the dialect of the tribe not by ignoring it or going on a Caribbean cruise but by involving himself in its fortunes and

[8] PATERSON FIVE, by *William Carlos Williams.* New Directions, 1958. No pagination.

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finding in it—against all expectation—the material of lithe speech. If purity in Eliot's sense means anything it means the 'measure' of the new poem. In the piece from *Paterson Five* the intricate organization is the deployment of phrases, sentences, defining with remarkable exactitude a movement of feeling which comes into full being for the first time in the words themselves. This does not dissolve *mimesis;* there is something out there to 'imitate,' a quality of experience someone else's sometime if not our own; but the 'imitation,' out of an infinite number of possible feelings, linked in 'kind,' settles for one and gives it, now for the first time, full being. This is the kind of autonomy the poem claims; it is happy to assent to the reality of human feeling and to live in that context. It does not fend off the day-to-day. It borrows, and repays with the interest of dedicated order. Birds and (later) flowers and tapestries are traditional accomplices of 'pure' poems, but here the speaker calls them into his experience so firmly that they are redeemed, humanized, both for him and for us. This is the true voice of feeling, clear in a human situation acknowledged as real and, if not our own, continuous with our own.

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JAMES DICKEY

The Owl King

1. The Owl King

I swore to myself I would see
When all but my seeing had failed.
Every light was too feeble to show
My world as I knew it must be.
At the top of the staring night
I sat on the oak in my shape
With my claws growing deep into wood
And my sight going slowly out
Inch by inch, as into a stone,
Disclosing the rabbits running
Beneath my bent, growing throne,
And the foxes lighting their hair,
And the serpent taking the shape
Of the stream of life as it slept.
When I thought of the floating sound
In which my wings would spread out,
I felt the hooked tufts on my head
Enlarge, and dream like a crown,
And my voice unplaceable grow
Like a feathery sigh;
I could not place it myself.
For years I humped on the tree
Whose leaves held the sun and the moon.
At last I opened my eyes
In the sun, and saw nothing there.
That night I parted my lids
Once more, and saw dark burn
Greater than sunlight or moonlight,
For it burned from deep within me.
The still wood glowed like a brain.
I prised up my claws, and spread
My huge, ashen wings from my body,
For I heard what I listened to hear.

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Someone spoke to me out of the distance
In a voice like my own, but softer.
I rose like the moon from the branch.

Through trees at his light touch trembling
The blind child drifted to meet me,
His blue eyes shining like mine.
In a ragged clearing he stopped,
And I circled, beating above him,
Then fell to the ground and hopped
Forward, taking his hand in my claw.
Every tree's life lived in his fingers.
Gravely we trod with each other
As beasts at their own wedding, dance.
Through the forest, the questioning voice
Of his father came to us there,
As though the one voice of us both,
Its high, frightened sound becoming
A perfect, irrelevant music
In which we profoundly moved,
I in the innermost shining
Of my blazing, invented eyes,
And he in the total of dark.
Each night, now, high on the oak,
With his father calling like music,
He sits with me here on the bough,
His eyes inch by inch going forward
Through stone dark, burning and picking
The creatures out one by one,
Each waiting alive in its own
Peculiar light to be found:
The mouse in its bundle of terror,
The fox in the flame of its hair,
And the snake in the form of all life.
Each night he returns to his bed,
To the voice of his singing father,
To dream of the owl king sitting
Alone in the crown of my will.
In my ruling passion, he rests.
All dark shall come to light.

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2. The Blind Child's Story

I am playing going down
In my weight lightly,
Down, down the hill.
No one calls me
Out of the air.
The heat is falling
On the backs of my hands
And holding coldness.
They say it shines two ways.
The darkness is great
And luminous in my eyes.
Down I am quickly going;
A leaf falls on me,
It must be a leaf I hear it
Be thin against me, and now
The ground is level,
It moves it is not ground,
My feet flow cold
And wet, and water rushes
Past as I climb out.
I am there, on the other side.
I own the entire world.

It closes a little; the sky
Must be cold, must be giving off
Creatures that stand here.
I say they shine one way.
Trees they are trees around me,
Leaves branches and bark;
I can touch them all; I move
From one to another—someone said
I seem to be blessing them.
I am blessing them
Slowly, one after another
Deeper into the wood.

The dark is changing,
Its living is packed in closer

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Overhead—more trees and leaves—
Tremendous. It touches
Something touches my hand,
Smelling it, a cold nose
Of breath, an ear of silk
Is gone. It is here I begin
To call to something unearthly.
Something is here, something before
Me sitting above me
In the wood in a crown,
Its eyes new-born in its head
From the death of the sun.
I can hear it rising on wings.
I hear that fluttering
Cease, and become
Pure soundless dancing
Like leaves not leaves;
Now down out of air
It lumbers to meet me,
Stepping oddly on earth,
Awkwardly, royally.
My father is calling

Through the touched trees;
All distance is weeping and singing.
In my hand I feel
A talon, a grandfather's claw
Bone cold and straining
To keep from breaking my skin.
I know this step, I know it,
And we are deep inside.
My father's voice is over
And under us, sighing.
Nothing is strange where we are.
The huge bird bows and returns,
For I, too, have done it
As he leads me, rustling,
A pile of leaves in my hands;
The dry feathers shuffle like cards

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On his dusty shoulders,
Not touching a tree,
Not brushing the side of a leaf
Or a point of grass.

We stop and stand like bushes.
But my father's music comes
In, goes on, comes in,
Into the wood,
Into the ceased dance.
And now the hard beak whispers
Softly, and we climb
Some steps of bark
Living and climbing with us
Into the leaves.
I sit among leaves,
And the whole branch hums
With the owl's full, weightless power
As he closes his feet on the wood.
My own feet dangle
And tingle down;
My head is pointing
Deep into moonlight,
Deep into branches and leaves,
Directing my blackness there,
The personal dark of my sight,
And now it is turning a color.
My eyes are blue at last.

Something within the place
I look is piled and coiled.
It lifts its head from itself.
Its form is lit, and gives back
What my eyes are giving it freely.
I learn from the master of sight
What to do when the sun is dead,
How to make the great darkness work
As it wants of itself to work.
I feel the tree where we sit

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Grow under me, and live.
I may have been here for years;
In the coil, the heaped-up creature
May have taken that long to lift
His head, to break his tongue
From his thin lips,
But he is there. I shut my eyes
And my eyes are gold,
As gold as an owl's,
As gold as a king's.
I open them. Farther off,
Beyond the swaying serpent,
A creature is burning itself
In a smoke of hair through the bushes.
The fox moves; a small thing
Being caught, cries out,
And I understand
How beings and sounds go together;
I understand
The voice of my singing father.
I shall be king of the wood.

Our double throne shall grow
Forever, until I see
The self of every substance
As it crouches, hidden and free.
The owl's face runs with tears
As I take him in my arms
In the glow of original light
Of Heaven. I go down
In my weight lightly down
The tree, and now
Through the soul of the wood
I walk in consuming glory
Past the snake, the fox, and the mouse:
I see as the owl king sees,
By going in deeper than darkness.
The wood comes back in a light
It did not know it withheld,

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And I can tell
By its breathing glow
Each tree on which I laid
My hands when I was blind.

I cross the cold-footed flowing,
The creek, a religious fire
Streaming my ankles away,
And climb through the slanted meadow.
My father cannot remember
That he ever lived in this house.
To himself he bays like a hound,
Entranced by the endless beauty
Of his grief-stricken singing and calling.
He is singing simply to moonlight,
Like a dog howling,
And it is holy song
Out of his mouth.
Father, I am coming,
I am here on my own;
I move as you sing,
As if it were Heaven.
It is Heaven. I am walking
To you and seeing
Where I walk home.
What I have touched, I see
With the dark of my blue eyes.
Far off, the owl king
Sings like my father, growing
In power. Father, I touch
Your face. I have not seen
My own, but it is yours.
I come, I advance,
I believe everything, I am here.

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Armor

When this is the thing you put on
The world is pieced slowly together
In the power of the crab and the insect.
The make of the eyeball changes
As over your mouth you draw down
A bird's bill made for a man.

As your weight upon earth is redoubled
There is no way of standing alone
More, or no way of being
More with the bound, shining dead.
You have put on what you should wear,
Not into the rattling of battle,

But into a silence where nothing
Threatens but Place itself: the shade
Of the forest, the strange, crowned
Motionless sunlight of Heaven,
With the redbird blinking and shooting
Across the nailed beam of the eyepiece.

In that light, in the wood, in armor,
I look in myself for the being
I was in a life before life
In a glade more silent than breathing,
Where I took off my body of metal
Like a brother whose features I knew

By the feel of their strength on my face
And whose limbs by the shining of mine.
In a vision I fasten him there,
The bright locust shell of my strength
Like a hanged man waiting in Heaven,
And then steal off to my life.

In my home, a night nearer death,
I wake with no shield on my breastbone,

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Breathing deep through my sides like an insect,
My closed hand falling and rising
Where it lies like the dead on my heart.
I cannot remember my brother;

Before I was born he went from me
Ablaze with the meaning of typhoid.
In a fever I see him turn slowly
Under the strange, perfect branches
Where somehow I left him to wait
That I might be naked on earth,

His crowned face dazzlingly closed,
His curving limbs giving off
Pure energy into the leaves.
When I give up my hold on my breath
I long to dress deeply at last
In the gold of my waiting brother

Who shall wake and shine on my limbs
As I walk, made whole, into Heaven.
I shall not remember his face
Or my dazed, eternal one
Until I have opened my hand
And touched the grave glow of his breast

To stop the gaunt turning of metal:
Until I have let the still sun
Down into the stare of the eyepiece
And raised its bird's beak to confront
What man is within to live with me
When I begin living forever.

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JOHN HAAG

Jonah

> "The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head."
>
> —*Jonah II, 5.*

*

Below the level of the reasonable eye
What presses most—the darkness or the sea?

That light that left me when I left the light
No longer bears me up; sodden, my weight

Sinks to the sea floor. I am leather-lunged;
I squeeze a stopped heart with a spasmodic hand.

These garlands of sargassum clutch my skull;
Thigh-deep, the grey-green streamers flow and swell,

Glowing in a sinuous meadow, slow
As gestation. . . I should remember where they go—

These tendrils, tendrils, tendrils—as they turn
And sway in the current. I am water-worn

And the hair on my hands lives like anemones
Or the beards of crabs; a jelly films my eyes;

Even my bones grow soft as bladderwrack.
A thallus anchors rootless upon the rock;

I slip from rock, glide to the rim—the depth.
Black violets blooming in the serpent's mouth,

Tongues of decay, a pulpy garden—all
Pass into shadow, darkening as I fall.

When did I choose to do this torpid dance
Of a brine-breather? Good air, I knew you once,

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But now my spongy tissue will not rise.
Father, the sky is more than I can loose.

* *

Who has found the limits of liquid? or the end
Of weeds? Warm-blooded breathers of the wind,

I tell you there's no bottom to the sea.
The feather and the stone bruise equally

In this fluid hub the darkness turns upon.
A nerve worms through the entire flesh to spawn

In the belly; a touch sets the gall afire
And kindles the unknown heart. . . Out of that lair

The final monster comes: blind as the waters,
From a swollen mouth and roots of hair it gathers;

Out of the self, unseen, unseeing, flows
That secret beast that swallows at it grows.

And I, engulfed in entrails, stiffen, bend,
Am limp again, am eel, slug, jelly—unboned,

Quiescent, listening to the tick of salt
Till, pressed by the pulse that beats in all things wet

I wait, quickening with the lust for lungs.
Is it time to move? The monstrous tallow clings

But my weedy shroud revives an older heat;
And, when I stretch, constraining tissues knot

Then quiver, expelling me like ambergris
On white and sun-hot sand. In a light place

I lie, new as a leaf, while bones unbend,
The flesh grows firm, and my hair dries in the wind.

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Fata Morgana,

on the narrow sea
from clear air you create a city—
mirrored in both, belonging to neither.

Above your hewn rock and ragged mortar
figures move in your bell-towers,
a centaur prances before your gates
and your banners hang limp to the sound of lutes
and doves. In the still air a chisel
rings on stone.
The little crabs
and I, on the blistering beach, listen
to your fish-criers, and your carillons
that signal a vortex of pigeons and hours
—but do I alone hear the grumble
of your weathered gargoyles?

Fata Morgana,
are your sounds a voice, which is my own,
from the holy city of the tongue,
forming dreams I shall have tomorrow?
Now I interpret the murmur of water
in your stone drains and cobble gutters,

but when will I walk your high-walled streets
and your piazza markets, Fata Morgana,
and pass among and touch your people
and hear, distinctly, their native speech
as though it had always been my own?

FATA MORGANA,

with care I've defended
myself against ordinary illusion
and the wistful error. I cannot dispel
therefore, the image that is real.

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I, as an acolyte, translated
the gestures of fishes, the fountain's idiom
and the repartee of draft and candle.

Now I pass the cul-de-sac
of the lyric-fingered lace-makers,
into the street of weavers, through
the place of furnaces that rud
the bubble cheeks of glass-blowers. . .

perpetual apprentice, I come
to lay mosaic, twist filigree
in silver, thump the potter's clay
and wear the stone-cutter's dust—
to turn my hand as your forms turn.

Fata Morgana, holy city,
where the true goldsmith comes to labor,
beating your stuff's ductility
to his own most perfect vision,
you
are that permanence to which I turn,
the earth made tangible at last,
and at the elbows of many masters
I make myself your natural citizen.

The Purist

With an oyster-shell he pared
His finger to the bone
Because pure bone was hard,
Was whiter, cleaner than
The flesh he did not trust.

After, he could not hold
His teacup—only point
With that unflexing digit;
And his paramour complained
Of the hand of death on her breast.

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BYRON COLT

Skärgård

Panes struck with silence like the pattern in the aerolite
When steel throws optic clefs on walls in the visibility of dining rooms,
When the cold front rustles in the nap of blankets—dry electricity from silk and glass
Of the pines on their height grown fine as cirrus where the chant of midges disappears in rareness. . .
Days of crickets, days of fire, walking on shadow and waxed shoes,
Traced in descent from other niveaus where silence runs at the freezing point
To strophes of vigor and solar eddas, formal as lightning in fulgurite.

There are rooms to rent on battered sea-fronts among the bark of gulls and religious chromos.
Time to read books the color of sulphur on amplifications of comoid cloud,
Works by scientific extremists on the memory of metals chilled by helium,
On wine turned to honey in rock-alveoles,
On sponges of cotton and liquefied air packed into clefts to perforate tunnels
In lonely cantons of biotite gneiss where languages freeze at an obsolete stage—
On sun symbols of the bronze age and oceanic forms with great powers of flight.

And then to go down to the federal beaches,
To the signals of the coast guard hazed with chlorides,
Through sunny isolations of oak and secret clearings of derelict iron,
Under fractocirrus of the fighter pilots, on duff strong as drinks with names like "Swampfire"—

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The land fit only for firing ranges: tripoli, tinder, the mocha
of needles,
Where the wasps burn with a pure irritation, and the sea's
fricatives come through dune-furrows—
To the last confederation of pine before the dunes, soaked
in language like peyotl cactus,

With words of a liminal and snowblind country
Where energy forges an hermetic speech:
Swept wings and bugles, ripple-marks and eolian rockets,
Symbols of origin and speed (lions stamped with the swastika,
the cast of an Artemisian jockey)—
Radical forms, the *soma* of brilliance,
Velocity welded to the visible
In the quiet center of dynamic mind as in brains stunned
with powerful alkaloids,

That launch the words for infallible things:
Dawn waterspouts with parasite clouds,
Porphyries visible on clear days from the sea—the first ski-
run of the day,
The moon's ring visibly afire at dawn in mica tailings and
shining snuff,
Balanced stones on anemonic heights where the world sings
like a top on its axis,
Where élans beat with élans in silence
Among pumas and meteoric lakes, in the dry incubation of
pacific suns—

Words to go back again in cities
With the morning mail plane and a meerschaum angel
When violence freezes chlorine in pipes and spurs the faces
of cornice-griffins,
When welders carry albino stars to the site of underground
power breaks,
When only the porters move in the buildings cooking with
faint night-lights,
At the relief of guards for maximum security prisoners,
In dry laments of wind and a dancing of arid tears,

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When temperature burnishes lamps like optician's rouge,
At seven o'clock Eastern Standard Time,
In a sky for extremists and the Commodore of the raid
Where steel sleds move through the cold of Réaumur with their incandescence in sealed glass—
With words that live beyond the braille of beacons,
The spark of cipher in shellac,
In double lights reversing the compass, in fire talking on an empennage.

I Think Of You Sangamon

I think of you Sangamon, Portage, Keewatin,
Your mineral page filled with quadrupeds,
Ape-men and burins, old brachial valves,
When you live in this *puna* of mountaineers
Where silence congested to fossil rhythms.
This music came last night from the poles,
From a weather station in the Arctic Circle
And the Christmas of an austral airbase,
From menthol volcanoes named for Grand Dukes
And one smashed cypress in the *ignis niger,*
From the pain of Balubas in the bauxite mine
And tortoise faces in their leather caps
Where peaks become letter and number like stars of Messier.
It gathered last night outside my window
On a level with lactic acid and grief,
Like a vintage filling the night of highways,
Rail torpedoes and jury lights
And the superstructure of cities like Cunard fires.
It flew with the shadow and speed in lamps,
With molten semen, accelerating stars,
With decumans of tears and the hammer of sleep
As lightning drifts towards ore-filled mountains.
It puts me once more in this crucible
With free-booters, pilots and *franc-tireurs,*

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Men with the Big Eye of Arctic explorers,
Cities with the Uhlans before the faubourgs.
It comes to me this morning like the auscultation
Of silences passing with their waterfalls
When the aluminum fleur-de-lis of bombers
Mixed new refrenations and stelliums
In horoscopes above the fire of cities—
With valorous hearts, the stirrup of wind
Where forces run without brake or bridle—
I think of you Sangamon, Portage, Keewatin,
Your face of old lavas and sufferings,
Your tears of diamond in volcanic necks
And your molten heart of nickel and iron.
Your spirit was formed in these furnaces
With the cold that cuts and shapes fragile crystal,
Black glacier, enfilade and storm—
At this point of crisis and temperature
When Weyprecht flashes race Radio-Narvik
With forecasts of coal-strike and avalanche—
I know you will turn us your other face
In the foehn, the chinook, the *yamo oroshi,*
When the south dilates with its fogs and fires
Through calm northern prefectures in upper air
With ores of nickel in concentric shells
And lattices of fireworks unexploded in their paper.
I know you will come with the luck of the south,
Narcissi and symbols of resurrection
With your districts of linden leaf and trolleys,
Volcanoes sensitive as flounder under storm,
The silk crop converted to parachutes—
I think of you Sangamon, Portage, Keewatin.

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WILLIAM ARROWSMITH

Helen on the Walls

The Iliad, iii, 121-242

Now to Helen of the white arms came a messenger, Iris,
disguised in the form of her sister by marriage, Laodike,
loveliest of the daughters of Priam, whom Helikaon wed,
the strong son of Antenor. And she found her in her rooms,
weaving with crimson cloth a great web that folded double,
in which she was working the tale of the numberless struggles
between Trojans, tamers of horses, and the bronze-clad Achaians,
all they had suffered for her at the bitter hands of Ares.
And Iris the quick-footed came, and stood beside her, and said:
"Come with me, dear girl, and see the wonder that has happened.
For those who once were at war, each man against the other
struggling in the plain, and whose only lust was for killing,
now sit in a sudden silence, and a lull has come in the war,
and they rest upon their shields and the tall spears are stuck
in the ground beside them. For now in a duel of single spears,
Alexander and brave Menelaos will fight together for you,
and you shall be the wife of the man who wins in the fighting."

So she spoke, and awoke a passion of longing in Helen,
sweet desire for the husband she had before, for her home
and her parents. Over her head she drew a veil of shimmering cloth,
and the tears stood in her eyes as she quickly went from her room;
but not alone, for two serving-girls went with her—
Aithre, daughter of Pittheus, and Klymene with gentle eyes
like the gentle eyes of cattle. And these three went swiftly down
toward the Skaian gates.

Now Priam was already there, and with him
were Panthios and Thmyoites, Lampos and Klytios,
Hiketaion, descended of Ares, Antenor and Oukalegon,
men of perceptive advice and the elders of the people,
whom age had retired from war, but excellent speakers still,
with voices clear and fine, like the voices of cicadas
who sing in the trees of the forest, and its fineness trembles the air

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like the whiteness of a lily. Such were they, the leaders of Troy,
who sat upon the tower.

But when they saw Helen ascending,
the old men murmured together and spoke their wingèd words:
"Surely no blame can touch either the men of Troy or Achaia,
because they suffer so long for the sake of a woman like this,
whose face, in its terrible beauty, is like the face of a goddess.
But goddess though she be, let her go away in the ships
and not remain in this land, a curse to us and our children."

So the old men murmured, but Priam called out to Helen:
"Come here, dear child, beside me. Sit here and now look down
on the husband you had before and your former friends and your peopl
In my eyes you are blameless; the gods, I say, are guilty
who drove upon me this bitter war with the men of Achaia.
But enough, and now tell me the name of that magnificent man.
Who is that man, so majestic among the Achaians?
He stands shorter by a head than most of the other fighters,
but never before have my eyes seen any man so noble,
so splendid or royal as this. Yes, he stands like a king."

And Helen, the glory of womankind, answered the king:
"Dearest father, never have I failed in the respect and fear
I owe you. But now I wish that I had died by my own hand
on that day when I came with your son across the sea in his ship,
leaving my home behind me, and my growing child, and my friends,
the lovely friends of my girlhood. But it has not happened that way,
and now I am worn with remorse. But this is my answer to you:
that man is the son of Atreus, powerful Agamemnon,
a king but also a fighter, a brave and an able spearsman,
and once my kinsman too—though who could believe that now,
whore that I am?

So she spoke, and the king marvelled at Agamemn
and exclaimed:

"Happy son of Atreus, favored of fortune,
how many men of Achaia stand mustered beneath your sway!
Long ago I journeyed to Phrygia with its lovely vineyards
and saw the Phrygian people in their wealth of horses assembled,
and all the gathered people of Otreus and Mygdon the godlike
who had pitched his camp beside the riverbanks of Sangarios.
For I too had come as an ally and was mustered among them

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on the day when the Amazon women, the peers of men, rode in.
But even they were not so many as all these quick-eyed Achaians."
Then, seeing Odysseus next, the old man questioned Helen:
"But tell me, dear child, who is that man I see there,
shorter by a head than Atreus' son Agamemnon,
but broader still in his build, across the chest and the shoulders?
His weapons lie on the ground, there in the fertile pasture,
but he moves himself like a ram along the lines of his soldiers.
Yes, to some great ram with shaggy fleece would I compare him
as he moves majestic among the ranks of resplendent sheep."
And the lady Helen, descended of Zeus, replied to the king:
"That is the son of Laertes, Odysseus, a shrewd man and cunning,
in Ithaka born and raised, in a poor and a rocky place,
but he is expert in craft and a master of every deception."
But now Antenor, a man of perceptive advice, broke in:
"Lady, what you say is the truth and also shrewdly spoken.
For once before now Odysseus and bold Menelaos
came here to Troy together on an embassy for you,
and I feasted them both in my house and made them welcome as friends,
and learned what each man was like, and shared their intimate thoughts.
Now when the Trojans assembled and these two men were compared,
Menelaos, standing, was the larger man in the shoulders,
but Odysseus the lordlier man when both of them were seated.
But when they rose to weave their words before us in council,
Menelaos spoke little, a few words and rapidly spoken,
but still extremely lucid, for he was sparing of speech
and his tongue never wandered, although he was the younger man.
But when the shrewd, the cunning Odysseus rose to speak,
he stood there stockstill, his eyes staring at his feet,
and made no gestures with his staff, pushing it to and fro,
but held it graceless and rigid, as a clumsy man might do.
You would have said he was stupid or sullen, and an oaf as well,
but when he started to speak, and the great voice swept from his chest
and the words came driving hard and fast like the winter snows,
then no other man on earth could hold his own against him.
And after we heard him speak, his clumsiness seemed to vanish."
But now, seeing Ajax next, the old man Priam asked her:
"Who is that other Achaian, that huge and massive man
looming above them all by the bulk of his head and shoulders?"

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And Helen in shimmering robes, the glory of women, replied:
"That is Ajax the great, the bulwark of all the Achaians.
And behind him stands Idomeneus, like a god among the Cretans,
and those are the lords of Crete, the men in a group around him.
Many times, I remember, Menelaos feasted him
at our house in Sparta when he crossed the sea from Crete.
And now I see them all, all the quick-eyed men of Achaia,
the men whom I know so well and whose names I could tell you;
but nowhere do I see those two, the shepherds of the people,
Kastor, tamer of horses, and the boxer, brave Polydeukes—
my own brothers, for we were born of a single mother.
Either they have stayed at home in Lakedaimon the lovely,
or came with their men to Troy across the sea in their ships,
but refuse to enter the fighting along with the other men,
in fear of the shame and the bitter reproaches upon me."

So she spoke, but the fertile earth lay on them already,
there in Lakedaimon, in the beloved land of their fathers.

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ISABEL CASSERES

Translations from Verlaine

Moonlight

Your soul is like a garden, most select,
Where charming people walk in dominoes,
Strumming the lute or dancing, gay-bedecked,
And with a touch of sadness in their pose.

Singing in minor key upon a theme
Of love triumphant and the world in tune,
They seem to doubt it, as it were a dream,
And all their songs are lighted by the moon;

The fair, sad moon, that shines so peacefully
It makes the birds forget their melodies,
And makes the fountains sob with ecstasy,
The slender fountains, white among the trees.

Song of Pleasure (VII)

So, it will be upon a summer day;
And the bright sun my own accomplice be,
Making, in silk and satin disarray,
Your beauty still more beautiful to me:

The sky, pure blue, like a great tent spread high,
Will shiver sumptuously in every fold
Across our happy faces, where we lie
Pale with emotion spent one hundred-fold:

And then when evening comes, the softened air
Will move among your veils, in faint design;
The friendly eyes of stars will find us there,
And smile upon our marriage, yours and mine.

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From a Prison

The sky is there above the roof,
So blue, so fair;
A tree that bends above the roof
Is swaying there.

A bell that hangs against the sky
Is softly ringing;
A bird that sits against the sky
Is softly singing.

O God, how beautiful is life!
How tranquilly
Up from the street, the sound of life
Is borne to me.

—And you, what is it you have done?
Tell me in truth!
O you that weep, what have you done
With all your youth?

Spleen

As for the roses, they were red;
As for the ivy, it was black.

My darling, if you move your head,
My every pain comes surging back.

The sky was always blue and fair,
And soft the air, and green the sea.

I wait,—each moment in despair!—
The moment of your flight from me.

And I am tired of greenery,
And glossy hedge along the grass,

And all the endless scenery,
And everything but you, alas!

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RICHMOND LATTIMORE

Letter from Athens

ATHENS IS CHANGING, fast and deep, but there is a core underneath that does not change. The old style of house was dull in itself, but with its tiles, heavy wooden blinds, position on the streets, and where there was room an iron gate or grille glimpsing into a little court with trees and plants, it made a street with character, an Utrillo or Van Gogh or Ghika Street. The streets, narrow, steep, stony, are mostly still there, just as they grew. Only in a few places have they gouged out huge broad speedways where the fast traffic never breaks. But on these basic crooked streets, everywhere, the old houses are being knocked down. What comes up instead will be a gleaming ultra-modern apartment building, six or seven stories, stepped back to a penthouse or two on the top floors. In the city which grows and sprawls mile after mile you see them everywhere. On Queen Sophia Street, the new wide superway leading out to the fashionable suburb of Kephissia, a Hilton Hotel is going up. This will be the last word in a way. I hate to say *what* way. But a hundred yards behind it, there is a country ditch and a donkey cropping grass. Beyond the city everywhere the brand-new suburbs are sprouting, with straight streets and cubical houses to which the office workers from the city rush back every evening on fast crowded buses, but beyond the suburbs are the villages, and the villages, like the donkey, seem to be eternal.

Athens is full of cars. There used to be a heart warming collection of antique pieces, notably American open touring-cars: Packard (twin-six), Peerless, Pierce-Arrow, Marmon: an occasional stately old Rolls. Now it's smaller craft, from every country that makes them, including Russia. They drive too fast, but who doesn't? The down town streets are one-way and have neon crossing signals, majestically enforced by the police, who are everywhere. If you are impatient, you just go up one of the narrow side-streets and jay walk. When the taxi drivers are not driving, they groom their cars with love and feather dusters. And along with the cars there are pushbikes, pushcarts, horse carts, stooped old women and little hardworking boys carrying fantastically large bundles, and lone delivery men making their rounds with yoghourt, ice, and vinegar, and crying them in the street, country women squatting on the curb with baskets of oregano or violets, men with strings of limp dead little birds, mostly thrushes and ortolans, sometimes quail.

The older good restaurants proffer a sort of 1900 international cuisine—the term dates and places itself—vaguely French in origin. They can do a good charlotte russe or baked Alaska or filet mignon, with canned peas to be sure, but that seems to be part of the elegance. The waiters wear black cutaways. The native Greek style is the *taverna*.

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The food is mostly ready and warm in great kettles, though they can grill you a fish, and you go out to the kitchen, see for yourself, and order what you like the looks of. With your meal you drink the local wine, white, sometimes rose, and heavily resinated. Beer has crept in, too. It is made by Phix (once Fuchs), is quite good, and well advertised on posters of a girl with a tall glass saying "Phix is good for you," and "health with enjoyment." The *tavernas* are now more fashionable than the restaurants. Many of them are to be found in the Plaka, the old part of modern Athens, a small maze of little stony alleys, steps, terraces and houses under the northern and eastern precipices of the Acropolis. Students and what seems to be the bohemian set and the more advanced tourists may sit there until late hours singing over their *retsina.* Not that the Greeks are heavy drinkers. They rather go in for bubbly soft drinks in the summer: the hour before dinner seems to find them favoring the sweet tooth with heavy cakes and creamy stuffs. Then there are the cafes, *kapheneions,* bare basic places with string chairs and hard tables. Women hardly ever enter them. Men sit there, read the papers, and play backgammon, cards, and chess, night and morning, but not in the afternoon, when almost everybody goes to bed for a while. Their refreshment is mostly Turkish coffee in tiny cups, but they often sit by the hour taking nothing at all. The standard aperitif is *ouzo,* colorless, rather sticky, licorice-flavored, and strong. Bottles of Scotch are tucked into the window displays of groceries in the more fashionable parts of Athens. I don't think very much is drunk, but it is good form to have it about for company.

The Greek people are on the whole exceedingly good-looking, just as, it seems, they always were. They are not large, but well made and very strong. I do not see the city girls looking their best these days, though there are plenty of country beauties. But in Athens, the beauty shop that Athens finds on every block does them up in a high spun and piled hairdo inspired, I suppose, by Brigitte Bardot and becoming only to her, if that. They use eye make-up and pale lipsticks and the whole effect strives toward the rather corpsely charms of Melina Mercouri. They totter along on ridiculously steep heels, but the legs themselves are excellent and they totter with authority.

The Christmas season has also seen an uneasy kind of westernization. Last year, the downtown streets were strung with colored lights and stars, and Santa Clauses patrolled the crowded streets patting kiddies on the head. The corner kiosks, those wonderful combinations of news-stand and general store packed into miniature houses six feet by six by eight, broke out suddenly in Christmas cards, Santa Claus faces oddly influenced by the newer ikons of the more venerable saints one sees in the chapels. The sidewalks were knee deep in holly, mistletoe, and fir branches and wreaths, but not many whole trees, since these are too precious to cut recklessly. Easter evidently means more. For this they keep their own calendar and it strikes their deep strong vein of religion. On Good Friday single bells toll at slow intervals all day.

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They carry the cross and coffin through the streets. But on Good Friday night the atmosphere is more cheerful than gloomy. High up the slopes of Lykabettos, the city's miniature mountain, couples sit holding hands, indicated by little points of candle light, and down below moving candle points show where the processions are passing.

Football, soccer of course, is the Greek game, and the world's game outside the U. S. Greek boys with any kind of ball will kick it to each other instead of throwing it, or dribble anything that can be dribbled endlessly down the street. It corresponds to basketball as a universal sport, to baseball as a professional show. At the matches it is strange for an American to watch a ninety-minute game with neither time-outs nor substitutions, and the game going right on while an injured player writhes on the field. The medical corps takes cares of him, but this doesn't interrupt play. When a player scores a goal his team-mates kiss him. Emotion in the stands runs high. They point their hands, with all five fingers extended, at the player or referee who has given offence. The gesture is a curse. It gives a creepy feeling as if we were at sport in the middle ages.

The ubiquitous police are snappy in gray-green uniforms, with burnished dragoon helmets for special occasions. Obviously, a policeman's career is a choice one. If there seem to be too many of them, one may remember that Athens is a safe city to live in. There may be some juvenile hoods, but their claws are clipped. Women are safe except for a little pestering by a type of unwanted male who is far milder than his Italian counterpart, the *bête noir* all foreign women know from Italy. Though Greeks, in Athens and elsewhere, may seem excitable, they are fundamentally law-abiding; in case individuals aren't, the force is there.

All through the world, one can observe, I suppose, in changing versions, the native character and way trying to maintain itself beneath an overlay of exotic customs. In some aspects the Greek life does as well without progress. The problems of child labor seem altered when one watches the four-foot-high boy carpenter or ice man manifestly good at his work and proud of it. One of my favorite kiosks is managed by a boy who can't be more than twelve with all the courtesy and competence of the adult kiosk-keepers, who are the salt of the earth anyway. The trashy reverse of this is seen in the gipsy boy or girl who trots along beside you with an outstretched palm, a wise half-grin, and a professional whine. Under all, I feel, is a bedrock of Greek character, strong, wiry, original, patient, hard-working, and artistically gifted to a deep degree. This last gift makes itself seen in surprising places, the meanest squatters' shacks of refugees neatly picked up and made pretty with flowers growing from white-washed gasoline cans, the painted decor of the caiques, those sail-and-power boats that haul goods and people along the coast and among the islands.

Greater Athens, with perhaps a fourth of the whole population, is the arterial heart of Greece, and the natural goal of ambitious Greeks

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all over the country. In antiquity from the fifth century on it was the most complete, intelligent, and fortunate of the Greek cities, and it has been so again since it was made the capital of independent Greece in 1834. But Athens and Greece are not synonymous. They never were.

There are the islands, the pride of Greece: scattered, steep, sudden, immaculate. The little towns are gleaming white, with very narrow streets that twist so as to give no channel to the winds that blow violently and make shipping dangerous. They are of all shapes and sizes. Large northerly islands, Lesbos, Corfu, are very green for Greece. The Cyclades are bare and rocky, with little beaches of fine sand, set on intensely blue and clear water. Capes and heights wear little white votive chapels in thanks for safety at sea. Some of the larger islands export their specialties, candy from Syros, marble from Paros, wine (unresinated) from Samos, Rhodes, and Thera (Santorini). Crete, the largest, is admired for its progressive statesmen and poets. Almost all have their characteristic potteries, far more attractive to me than the imitations of antiquity that flood the souvenir-shops of Athens. Almost all produce magnificent woven fabrics. Hydra, Corfu, Mykonos, Thera, and especially Rhodes, are resorts and show places for tourists, and not all tourists are foreigners by any means. In the summer the city populations throng to their coasts and nearby islands, Athenians to Aegina (ignoring Albanian Salamis), the people of Cavalla to Thasos. I can remember when we foreigners had the bathing-beaches to ourselves. No longer. The local population of swimmers is everywhere, changing dexterously and without nudism on the shore. Bath-houses and even life guards make their appearance near Athens. In winter, the islands live their own life. For all the tidiness of their existence it is hard to see just how they make out.

There is Saloniki, the great city of the north, guarded on the inside by a Byzantine wall and full of Byzantine churches, with busy avenues and streets of smiths. It has, what Athens does not, a great broad quay where in the evening, especially on Sundays, the population endlessly strolls up and down. In small towns like Sparta, Thebes, and Livadia they do this in great open central squares, and one senses in such places a quiet parochial life full of personality whose story, so far as I know, has never been fully told. The farmer's life centres on the village. These are thick where the land is good. From Old Corinth at night I could see more than twenty clusters of light across and down the gulf. By day from any high place you see long lines of workers in the fields, mostly women in bright colored costumes and veiled against the sun. At day's end they come back to the village on mules and donkeys but more and more in cheerful truck loads. On Sundays they dress up and stroll for miles along the highways, the girls most of all, walking hand in hand. The waysides are punctuated by little shrines and holy pictures, and almost everyone, the strollers, the mule riders—even (sometimes) the city motorcyclists with their nonchalant pillion riders,—crosses himself as he goes by.

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Then too there is the world of the mountains, big, bold, abrupt, wooded up the sides, but on the tops and upper folds offering grass where the shepherds drive their flocks in the summer time. In winter they are covered with snow. There are alpine clubs and some skiing, but the wilder high mountains in winter are mostly left to the wolves.

In Athens, at the end of a street or from far away across the sea of houses, one becomes suddenly aware of the flat-topped rock, the Acropolis, and picks out the precise columns of the Parthenon. Despite this, however, and despite the temples, of Poseidon at Sounion and of Apollo at Bassae and Corinth, the recognizable standing remains of ancient architecture are not an ordinary feature of the landscape. One sees far more often the ruined castles of Frankish barons perched on strong hills above the valleys and towns on which they preyed. All antique buildings alike have been thoroughly pillaged for their well-made parts to build into churches, houses, and well-curbs; or formerly into mosques, and these in turn, except sometimes in the north, have been redistributed. But these bones are rising and reassembling again. The Greek archaeologists are putting through a wide-reaching program of restoration. The Parthenon has more columns now than she did a while ago. The whole process, called *anastylosis* ("recolumning") is regarded with a doubtful eye by foreign archaeologists.

The modern Greek language has two forms. One is *demotike,* the vernacular, ancient Greek very strongly modified by centuries of organic growth, accretion, and colloquialism; the other is *katharevousa,* the classicizing literary language. The existence of the two languages has created hostile camps for literature and scholarship; there have been riots over the matter in the past, and there is still bitterness. At the University of Athens they write and even speak *katharevousa.* The University of Saloniki is the academic stronghold of *demotike. Katharevousa* is the official language, is mostly used by the newspapers, and is seen in a very pure form in public notices. One is advised not to spit on the floor in practically fourth-century Attic. The literary world is naturally at odds, but the new writers tend strongly toward *demotike* as being the more natural voice of the people; it is, after all, what everybody talks outside of certain lecture halls. Kazantzakis has given *demotike* a good strong push.

The very existence of a *katharevousa* makes it plain that the sheer quality of Greek thought and art of the classical period involves, in memories of old glory, a kind of incubus. There is a living strain of Greek traditional art; but it sometimes tends to be obscured or obstructed, from one direction by the consciousness of classical antiquity, from another by western fashions. What some Greeks of today find and work as their own belongs to neither of these traditions. Dance is a case to consider. The long lines of men and girls in folk costume are familiar to everyone. They appear on public and commercial occasions, but also, at parties and on ship board, at almost any time and place, groups will spontaneously start a chain and dance traditional steps,

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self-accompanied by their own singing. But there is also the ballet, and the classicizing reconstruction of ancient dance and drama with the help of representations in ancient art.

The nineteenth-century founders of modern Greek poetry came mainly from the West of Greece, the face which looks toward Italy, and on the formal side they were much influenced by Italian and French. The generally cosmopolitan background has produced its fine poets, such as Cavafy, consciously Alexandrian, who stands all by himself in history without predecessors or successors. But the two influences I spoke of tend to assert themselves. Elytis, one of the best contemporary poets, is of the French surrealistic school, but works with native materials. On the other hand, Kazantzakis for his *Odyssey* returned to the ballad metre which was used in the middle ages and in the songs of the resistance against Turkish domination, and in it has consciously tried to exploit an ethnic earthiness of storytelling and the creation of characters. The romantic novelist Myrivilis has a surer hand and a more authentic feeling. The realistic novel, which some Greeks consider to be a form almost new to Greek literature, can grow only on or close to native ground, as one of the chief exponents, Venezis, seems to realize. He has used the harsh memories of the Asia Minor Greeks in the near past, with the friezes of refugee groups which have haunted the Greek scene, but his talents are applied to a wide variety of materials: almost everything except the sedate small city, which still seems to be looking for its novelist.

To the painter, the Greek landscape, including the settlements of whatever sort, might well be almost embarrassingly rich in attractions and perfections. The painting now when mediocre runs strongly to a sweet-and-pretty kind of naturalism, but you will also see the effect of contemporary fashions of the non-objective order, as well as classicizing reconstructions. But of course the realist who wants ugliness can easily find it, while a more imaginative and creative painter like Ghika can make his own world from the generating world of the Plaka streets. Plakotares, Kanelles, and Diana Antonakatou are new, good names to remember.

Greece was never exactly a tranquil country. Now, with a stable and comparatively tolerant government that grants representation to all, decorated if not led by its brilliant and beautiful royal family, and despite the agonies, starvations, and injustices of the past generation, it seems as if the nation might be better balanced than it used to be, with a small country's interesting future. The military bulbs are excrescences on the middle-sized mountains and the jets make trails in the sky, reminding us that none of us may be going anywhere except up in smoke. Meanwhile, otherwise, and with a side glance at such demonstrations, and crossing my fingers, I would say that Greece is finding its own Greek way in life and art which is constantly overgrown but never overwhelmed in the lendings from other civilizations.

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VERNON YOUNG

European Film Notebook

> "Europe is, perhaps, the least worn-out of the continents because it is the most lived in. A place that is lived in lives."—*D. H. Lawrence*

ENGLAND ISN'T EUROPE, though she has creatively fed and been fed by it in the past. Today she looks toward America, if with condescension, or toward Russia, in some hours shrewdly, in others blindly. In the film she looks at herself, with an alarming increase of disgust . . . Johnny Byrne, Member for Labour, is required to make a journey to Canossa —in this case the Midland constituency to which he owes his political office. Forced to make an ingratiating speech before an assembly as rancidly ignorant as it is uncouth, Byrne quits the meeting abruptly at the peak of his humiliation and relief, in order to vomit. In the film *No Love for Johnny* the occurrence is implausibly timed; the whole movie, incompetently directed and confusedly scripted, is a not exceptional hazard of *tendenz*-film production and would bear little discussion if it were not for that climactic event, a sad harsh equivalent of many others, not always so contemptuously pointed, in what can only be termed the Hate-England trend of British cinema. Since circa-1958 there has been a stir in English film-making. General agreement seems to believe the Stir is a Good Thing; it has made gains in critical realism. Petulant or, alternatively, Spiteful Realism, I'd call it. It opens nothing out, though it opens much up, to dubious advantage. The English-at-home may find themselves titillated by prolonged closeups of tongued kisses and by the liberty of the actor to call someone a bloody bastard. Such gains in artistic freedom are radically unimportant; if a relaxation of mores brings no enlargement of spirit, the only advantage has been expletive. The generic Englishman indicated by his recent film is in a more embarrassed plight than W. H. Auden's Herod: he has performed all the liberal exorcisms and they've brought him no comfort. Having seen through the royal game, the landed gentry, colonialism and the absurder fictions of the school tie, and having duly registered these in a well-tempered sequence of comedy, he has allowed himself to be led by the nose into the more equalitarian purlieus of socialism. He has apotheosized the Common Man and he's just getting the full taste of how utterly common he is, and no less corrupt than the Uncommon one; he can't stomach him. There's little he can stomach when he obediently cultivates the sociological awareness demanded of him, and no matter in how well-bred a voice he expresses his doubts in the weeklies the film image he projects is both scabrous and desperate. Conditioned by the empirical fathers of his film, John Grierson and Alfred Hitchcock, he is unprepared to make

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or to receive movies from any but topical sources. Thus walled, he gasps for air but the windows open to no view. If at large he accepted the "Nature" of those wide-screen postcards in *Sons and Lovers* as wholeheartedly as a nucleus of his critics, he is city-pent with a vengeance.

Look them over. The Peter Sellars comedies: mirthless. *Look Back in Anger:* someone's looking over the wrong shoulder. Is the real object of the hero's wrath un-analyzed or merely concealed? *The League of Gentlemen:* a loaded romp, heavy with anti-female malice, and why the homosexual gambit? Fun? *Tunes of Glory:* sheer agony, beautifully acted; an over-literary, of course, exposure of two men used up by life, mistakenly attempting to destroy each other in their disappointment. But the scenarist hung on at the last to the tartan of heroic idealism. *Hell is a City* and *The Concrete Jungle:* the very titles are Hollywood but the first benefits from improved styling contributed by the French—and Val Guest directs, bravely, enough plot and buzzing milieu for five pictures; the second is a dismaying departure on the English scene: it takes the criminal for granted. *The Angry Silence:* annihilates all parties with no corresponding hysteria or collapse of film treatment. Probably the best film made about Labour-Management relations: a distinction, of sorts. And unconsoling. The ordinary decent man has an eye gouged out by Teddy-boys, and his shiftless friend's belated admonition to the audience to think about what they've all done to the man who won't say yes is a lost cause. . . .

If the exasperation in the English film is inevitable, given the social terms, it is none the less debilitating. All the same it's painful to watch a country's heart breaking. One wants somehow to reassure the English that since art never solves anything, they have other resources for the movie than the masochistic observation of Saturday nights and Sunday mornings. "For Monday comes when none may kiss," and they've been saturated for centuries with the poetry of earth and with verse, and polemics, that will exalt our language for as long as it's heard. One wants to remind them that rationalism hasn't yet confounded their hearing and sight, nor cancelled their instinct for daily kindness. . . Had they the motive and the cue for self-destruction that Sweden has, for instance, they'd drown the stage with tears, make mad. . . Amaze, indeed. . .

Sweden, having no self-knowledge, hence has no shame—no tears. But it does (or should) appall the relatively free, and it makes mad the innocent as well as the guilty—if, within so homogeneous a setting, one can be certain of the distinction. The most colossal social hoax of our time is the advertised and widely accepted claim that Sweden has "solved" its human problem—in any direction whatsoever. Social democracy, in Sweden, is the "objective correlative" of its endemic fear of real contact. If a structured system within society will guarantee the char-

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ities, the compensations and the pensions, this will effectually relieve the individual from having to care at all about his neighbor. *Safety* is the sole national value: under that watchword responsiveness is curtailed, nuance vanishes, enthusiasm dwindles, charity never begins at home. Was there ever a people so *begrudging*?—of passion or of pathos. The very day of Hammarskjold's burial, a letter published in a Stockholm paper warned Swedes against excessive sorrow with the reminder that he had not, after all, been politically infallible. . . .

The English ghost story is said to be a compensation for the national lack of a metaphysic, or the expression of a subconscious need for the macabre in the over-civilised. But say this: ghosts were once *people*, and England is haunted by presences. Who ever heard of a Swedish ghost story? . . . Anxiety is of course driven inward: there it lodges, untranslatable and unredeemed. As ever, on this subject, D. H. Lawrence has uttered the last prophetic word. "It is one of the terrible qualities of the reason that it has no life of its own. . . Make any people mainly rational in their life, and their inner activity will be the activity of destruction."

Swedish film is no escape hatch. Two recent "crime" movies show how deeply lies the inhibition. There must be better stories of murder available than *Lovely is the Summer Night,* a film in which you couldn't care less who done it because you're never interested in the people to whom it was done. A provincial town, a girl who disappears, a man hanged in a tree: an investigation by detectives as drab as the milieu they're investigating (a Father Brown, an Inspector Maigret, even a Phillip Marlowe, is inconceivable under Swedish conditions of personality), an incest theme—how the Swedish are obsessed with sex without ever transfiguring it by a vibration or a cadence in their public speech! Directorially, it's impeccable. Given the material, nobody could have done better with the camera angles, the terminal fadeouts, the narrative logic, than Arne Mattson did. But all for what? Not even for Hecuba. Likewise, the film, *Stöten* (but "The Big Job" would be a relevant English title), made by Hasse Ekman who has been directing films for twenty-years without producing more than a single movie which would entitle him to international consideration (that one, *The Girl with the Hyacinths*). In this one he has the benefit of stunning photographic chiaroscuro by Martin Bodin and he keeps the chase going with a skill he has never before displayed. Again, it's the scenario at fault—or rather, it's the featureless characters, since such a story can only be as enthralling as the people who give it momentum. Two escapees from a Stockholm prison rob the race-track office at Taby and flounder their stupid way to Malmö, thence to Copenhagen. (Could it be more than a geographical gimmick that dictated their capture by *Danish* authorities? God forbid the suggestion that Swedish policemen are ever unkind to murderers and thieves!) While awaiting capture, one of the witless pair mumbles a confession, recalled from a French

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movie, about being lonely. The Girl, as photogenic as she is socially implausible, has allegedly got into bad company (a shady haunt of criminals and prostitutes in Stockholm) because she had come to the big city from a repressive country-town environment and couldn't get a job! This is supposed to be 1960, not 1916. One look at this *flickan* and you know very well that within a year of arriving in Stockholm she'd become the *second*-highest-paid fashion model for Swedish womens' journals to gloat over. . . . These films are symptomatically at the center of the Swedish crisis: all technics, no content. A scenery without a drama, a landscape undefiled because in any root sense it remains uninhabited. Acres of granite, pine, birch and meadow challenge architects to a new style for a new horizon. They plant tower-blocks—pylon apartment-houses with balconies that resemble lookouts on a whaler. From the middle distance these buildings look as if they'd been left by someone with his arms full who's coming back to pick them up.

Without Bergman, there would be no Swedish film to speak of. And I think Bergman has now passed the cape where his art can enlarge our perceptions. With his latest film, *Såsom I en Spegel* (literally "As If in a Mirror," but of course it's the biblical reference, "As In a Glass, Darkly"), he is about his father's business. The 14th-century *Virgin Spring* cupped the whole world—lights and shadows, snow and sunshine, joy and the terrible, food and poetry, the stench of men and the wrath of God. Twentieth-century Sweden is unavailing as a source of rich, visible life. Four people on a dark Baltic island, and the Swedish Situation flickers out once more in approaching madness, incest and an offshore gleam of faith—"God is love." A sombre, depressing film, as monochordic as the Bach cello which, at brief intervals (probably three-minutes-worth in the whole film) vibrates as a deep but laconic undertow: an intensely private, unadorned film—all the more Swedish, just so. All Swedish expression finally retreats, with less inner justification than Bergman's, into the barest possible essentials of situation and design. Not the apples of Cézanne, but three sour grapes.

Robinson Jeffers once wrote, "It is good to look westward as to look upward." In Sweden it's good to look southward, and across the straits. Little of the German vitality, curiosity and dynamo-driving enterprise, which you feel at every hand, has entered the post-War II German film, however; for too many probable reasons to explore here. It's too simple to conclude that because their best films in this period *have* been war films—*08/15, Kermesse, Am Gälgen Hangt der Liebe, Die Brücke*—their abiding impulse is belligerent. In fact these films convey humane values more successfully than any other films they make! There's of course always the possibility that in any country movie-making may not happen to be the medium through which the nation best interprets itself. Without reviving here the single most popular

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explanation of Germany's post-War I films, I'll risk my conviction that the German early Twenties produced many great film-makers who never made a great film. But did Germany ever? Not any you'd celebrate without reservation of one kind or another. The unifying energy which gave rise to the Third Reich seems also to have been the energy which invoked their best films, between 1929 and 1939. None more impressive, that is to say, have been made there since than Fritz Lang's *M,* Walter Ruttman's *Berlin* and *Melodie die Welt,* the Nürnberg and Olympics films of Leni Riefensthal, the diabolic *Die Alte und die Neue König* of Hans Steinhoff.

For me the most memorable piece of film made in Germany since World War II is a ten-minute episode in Helmut Kautner's *In Jenen Tagen* ("In Those Days"), a multi-story film from 1946. The most pressing sentiment then for Germans out of which to make movies was not how wrong they'd been but in what ways they had suffered and survived. "Night Journey in Russia, 1943" concerns the resolution of a Wehrmacht officer, new to the Russian front, to be driven by a corporal to his battery, perhaps 200 miles distant. They must start *now,* i.e. before night comes down; at which the corporal, an older man and a veteran in the territory, demurs. The distance is great, it will be completely dark, they must drive through partisan-spotted areas, the landscape is disquieting. The officer is not intimidated; he's unafraid, he has a destination, they must utilize time and the cover of night: it's an order. Unwillingly the corporal complies; they drive, and that's your 8 or 10 minutes of film—it could have been five or twenty-five minutes, for all I was aware. Two men in a car at night, and Kautner never, I think, leaves their faces, from one angle or another, except perhaps to reverse-shoot the nothingness in their headlights' glare. He's inside, or looking through the windshield outside, at a side door, or between them. There's no world but that of the two vigilant men, the sound of the car-engine, the flowing darkness, the increasing smell of fear, the huddle toward *kameradschaft.* They exchange civilities, smile, the officer hitches himself closer to the corporal, faces light up above glowing cigarettes in the purring blackness. Then the sudden ambush: the driver is shot through the head, the car veers, swerves wildly, crab-skids off the road onto a low embankment. Somehow the officer manages to clear the foot pedals, manoeuvers the car back into the road and onward, with the dead man slumped against him, on past the firing and the moment of doom. He holds the other man closer to him as he drives on and the episode fades.

"New Wave" is not a half-bad term. If I remember my primary lessons in oceanography a single wave, retaining the mother-elements of which it is composed, travels head-long until its inertia is checked; whether it subsides or breaks its elements are remerged in the matrix. There will come a day when a French film from the turn of the 60's

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will simply be an experience with a title: few will know that it was once called New-Wave and it will have to be judged on what merit it then intrinsically displays. I'll have to trust growing decencies of perception to outweigh the nimble affectations of the hour. I believe that *Les Quatre Cents Coups* and *Le Trou* will be seen to have more importance than *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* and *Breathless* which are just now the latest thing and the last word. When I say more important I mean they'll stay alive longer because they've been lived in as well as thought out. In America, where readable-at-all film comment is largely in the hands of collegians, the syncopated, the spastic and the discrepant are understandably the qualifiers that recommend themselves. Young people are subjective but also frigid; it takes an oblique sensation to arouse their respect. In most of the rhapsodic critiques I've read on *Hiroshima* (not all of them American) the question of whether or not it engages a deep response hasn't arisen; the film has been praised solely on its declared novelty value. The crux of the novelty seems to be the disjunctive cutting where, for instance, an ostensible reference to someone in the present is then precipitously visualized by cutting to an image from the past—or where a line of dialogue is given irony through a succeeding image which refers to an unrelated subject. This is not, to begin with, a discovery of Alain Resnais, nor is its employment in a full-length film unprecedented. Alf Sjöberg's *Miss Julie,* made a decade ago, was built precisely on such disjunctures which were more fluidly conducted throughout the film as a whole. The elisions in *Hiroshima* do impel greater jumps, to be sure—they're in many cases more subtle, if you like. Yet if you make degree of ellipsis your criterion for narrative discontinuity you will have encouraged calisthenics for its own sake and will shortly arrive at non-sense; this apart from the fact that the spoken-narrative, silent-image troika (to use This Week's term) is a cinematic regression. I don't personally care if a method is yesterday's or the day after tomorrow's if it brings me a kindled sense of life. I was not engrossed by Resnais. His subject was love and death and his treatment seemed to me analagous with Edith Sitwell's in poetry. Marvellous diction; her vocables are as calculated to arouse nuances of emotion as variably-ground lenses—and I don't believe in her . . . I believe in Kenneth Clark (on *The Nude*). "The exploitation by the intellect of a theme usually governed by the emotions must always be disturbing to a normal sensibility."

There will always be those who believe that *Zéro de Conduite* and *Blood of a Poet* are not just historically remarkable but are absolutely greater than, say, *Crainquebille* and *Amore.* There will always be a film-maker for whom the naturalism of the moment lacks the formalism which for him confers art, and another for whom the current naturalism is insufficiently natural. The contest has been waged, exemplified and argued over before. Today Resnais is at one pole and I'd say, without having seen *Shadows,* that Cassavetes is closer to the other than any

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French director. The distinctions are not often purely formal; a social attitude is implied. The most sophisticated review I've read of *Breathless* tells me in effect that a beatnik subject is best rigged in a beatnik style. Which is really unarguable; it has no premise for me to engage. . . . The odd thing is that in the American magazines "New Wave" has been applied to at least three styles divergent from each other, and the work of a director I'd personally characterize before all others as wearing the new impudence hasn't to date (Fall, '61) been seen in the U. S. That's Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, with his tongue-in-cheek experiment, frivolous use of romantic idiom, underlying classicism. Is he important? I don't know. Is a crab cocktail important? Is a Martini important?

When a man can make a film that breathes reverence for life in a setting constituted for nothing but imminent death, a setting where there's not a single external property or secondary quality we normally associate with life—not a book or a flower, no crack of sunlight or trickle of rain, no food to relish, barely elbow-room, no sounds remotely connoting nature or potentially friendly man—when he can make a film without these elements and yet bewitch us with his power to reveal what poetry there is in *tools,* what divinity there may be in the selflessness of outlaws: when he can do this he's an artist and he may die, if he must, with that distinction. The late Jacques Becker opened the 50's with *Casque D'Or,* a ferociously uncanny rehearsal of the Paris Apache underworld around 1900. A suffocating film: its barely contained passion exerted an unbearable pressure on the spectator. During the decade Becker never produced a film to put beside it and for a while we thought we'd lost him to Arsène Lupin. Before we did lose him, to God, he left us his last film testament, *Le Trou* ("The Hole"), a tribute to the so-called worst among us, as inclement as *Casque D'Or,* as frighteningly intimate with the felon mind, and with neither period costumes nor Serge Reggiani nor Simone Signoret to soften the blows. Prison-break films from elsewhere are made either as exposés or for the sake of the excitement alone (it's a built-in consequence). Becker's film—it recapitulates a Paris actuality of 1947—is, as befits the French art, an exposé of men—approaching a zero hour. Acted in the main by "amateurs" (they have nothing to declare but Becker's genius), keyed down to a documentary absence of refined lighting and a measured concentration on implements of escape, *The Hole* in truth opens the very ground under one's safe feet. It has a cloacal smell, it spares us nothing of what we fear all along, it forces us to live with five men so that we tell ourselves we "know them," and it brings to the screen one of the most arresting inanimate agents of suspense ever contrived: a periscopic tooth-brush handle which toys with the Inexorable until its very image is evoked.

The European Common market . . . Becker's Condemned digging their way out under the very eyes of Judas . . . Germany driving into the endless Russian night with its dead corporals in its arms.

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JOHN SIMON

Theatre Chronicle

THE ONE SHOW THAT COULD RUN FOREVER on Broadway would be a big, vulgar musical about Jewish Negroes. The author would have the reviewers, audiences, and Pulitzer people eating out of his little hand, and would not even have to consider all the perfumes of Arabia. Unfortunately, our showmen seem to be incapable of appropriating more than two of these useful ingredients at one time: thus *Milk and Honey* is a big musical about Israel, *Kwamina* a big musical about Africa, and *Purlie Victorious* has its Negroes celebrating Chanukah in their church. Yet a score of two out of three is hardly a negligible achievement, and I trust that all three shows are reaping their just rewards, though I can as of this moment report only on the third.

One of the characters in Ossie Davis's *Purlie Victorious* says, "Some of the best pretendin' is done in front of white folks," a maxim whose truth is corroborated at the box office of the Cort Theatre. The play is a kind of *Abie's Irish Rose* in blackface with somewhat heightened social consciousness and an author who has heard of Brecht. The humor of this farce, except for a few brighter moments in the second scene, consists of jokes in which a wife tells a husband who is retreating toward the stable, to look after the mule by all means, because, she observes, he and it are two of a kind; or of hilarious speeches in which the hero boosts the heroine's morale by assuring her she should be praised in all the languages of Africa, from Swahili to Bambulan, and proceeds to name every last one of them. (If only the encyclopedias could teach you as much about play-writing as about African dialects!) But because the huge topic of integration and social justice is treated farcically, the spectators can, if their sense of humor is as sophomoric as their social awareness, see themselves as a liberating army marching on its belly-laughs. Hence *Purlie Victorious* has been hailed with the subliterate encomia befitting another *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. But I doubt that it will succeed in bringing about another civil war, because it is so much less witty than Mrs. Stowe's immortal classic of *humour noir*.

The play is, however, admirably acted, and all the players whip up such a storm of performing that one can almost miss the vacuum at the eye of the storm. There is Ruby Dee's ability to make benightedness take on heroic proportions, Alan Alda's mastery in ringing changes on one note, Sorrell Booke's skill in making outrage look like a household commodity, and Godfrey M. Cambridge's marvelous black Falstaff without the assistance of Shakespeare. These and a couple of others manage to turn *Purlie Victorious* into somewhat less of a fiasco.

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But if the success of *Purlie* is at best a national scandal as yet, that of the Greek Tragedy Theatre is well on its way toward being an international one. I saw the double bill consisting of the two final plays of the *Oresteia;* it was also a double translation: into demotic Greek and plebeian performing. Though we were assured on all sides of authentic recreations of classical drama, Mr. Rondiris, the founder-producer-director, not only failed to give us the true accouterments of Greek tragedy, but also defied ancient Greek practice by making the chorus speak—not just sing—in unison. (Of an intelligent modernization, he evidently cannot even conceive.) The avoidance of masks in the *Eumenides,* I could, to be sure, understand: Mr. Rondiris, who in one respect at least seems to be as Greek as can be, has picked a chorus whose resemblance to women is close to absolute zero, and their naked faces achieved a bloodcurdling likeness to the Furies' which even the most terrifying masks could only have palliated. The dancing reminded one of an amateurish imitation of Ruth Draper doing her celebrated take-off on eurhythmics; the music might do in a pinch for toy soldiers or circus horses; the costumes, identified by the more than usually illiterate program notes as "products of the famous Greek textile handicraft," made the people and nobles of Argos look like a second-rate leper colony performing an Offenbach operetta.

A few random snapshots: the great recognition scene of the *Choephoroe* played like a rather jolly meeting between two Tenth Reunionists on the old Quadrangle; Orestes leading Clytemnestra to her death as though he were about to rebuke her for having neglected to water the aspidistra during his absence; the body of Aegisthus carried on stage from right to left on a litter covered with a threadbare orange shawl—and a few minutes later, Clytemnestra's body carried on: same litter, same bearers, same thin orange shawl, only now, of course, from left to right. And what of the Orestes who appeared to have come home not to claim bloody justice but his old age pension, the Apollo who looked and sounded like a cut-rate catamite, the Clytemnestra who was a sort of faded Melina Mercouri without benefit of *bouzoukia*—but why go on? The one authentic touch was the zippers on the costumes of the Eumenides: they were the zipperiest zippers I ever saw. In short, small acting and less Greek.

The director, Dimitrios Rondiris, who arrogated the only full program note to himself (well ahead of Aeschylus), is to be commended for sparing no effort to appear at the theatre in time for curtain calls after every performance, matinees included, and taking a wholly unsolicited bow—though for some reason denying us the sight of the three decorations which the program says he was awarded—thus proving that, like chivalry in France, hubris is not yet dead in Greece. It may be worthy of note also that this *Oresteia* was warmly received by our reviewers, both by those who, following the program, gave its date as 45 B.C., and those who declared it three thousand years old.

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Another excursion into ancient Greece was afforded us by Maurice Valency's *The Thracian Horses,* a retelling of the Alcestis story. Mr. Valency was kept waiting twenty years before he could see his play put on in New York, but, as if in compensation, he had to wait no more than one week to see it taken off. I was secretly hoping that all the wit and charm Mr. Valency had removed from his adaptations of Giraudoux and Dürrenmatt might have been stored up in his own play, which would then have been very rich indeed. But Mr. Valency is no embezzler. And no playwright, either. But he may draw some comfort from the fact that even such more Herculean Americans as T. S. Eliot and Thornton Wilder have failed to bring Alcestis back to our stage alive.

Mr. David Ross continues his Ibsen cycle by giving us a production of *Ghosts* that marks a small step up from his *Hedda Gabler.* Robert Brustein and even Walter Kerr have so cogently criticized the gross and wanton cutting, the many specific misinterpretations, and the general mis-staging, that I can content myself here with filling in a few minor gaps.

The quality of an Ibsen translation increases at an inverse ratio to the number of *fancy*'s used—I mean, of course, the verb and interjection, not the noun. Well, this version by Mrs. Ross out of R. Farquharson Sharpe does not pass the *fancy* test, not by a long—or Archer's—shot. It features, furthermore, such tidbits as "What do you want to pay any mind to that for?" "Are you trying to humbug me?" "Indeed I set myself very definitely against that!" "I can get that much for myself if I have a mind to," "When Oswald was first born," "I'm speaking only as a kind of a metaphor," and many more.

But the production had other curiosities. Thus there was the utterly extraordinary pacing of the first-act scene between Pastor Manders and Regina, in which Staats Cotsworth and Carrie Nye religiously maintained from line to line an insane and excruciating rubato: presto, adagio, presto. Moreover, the whole cast indulged in a spitting contest which Miss Nye won hands down. Her every syllable, obviously too precious to be entrusted to the flimsiness of mere air, was floated down a little ocean supplied by her salivary glands. Leueen MacGrath's interpretation of Mrs. Alving as a *grande dame* did not quite hold water (in another sense), but at least it was accomplished, lively, and, at times, affecting. Mr. Cotsworth was one-sided, and Miss Nye narcissistic. As Oswald, Joseph Marino looked and acted Gregor Samsa to perfection; his eye-popping bit as he surveys Regina's charms could have been condoned only by a director of Mack Sennett's or David Ross's stature. Incidentally, Mr. Ross fired most of his original cast well after rehearsals had begun, and hired a new set of actors. Why? The dismissed cast, I fancy, could scarcely have been more unfaithful to Ibsen's intentions.

Those who complained they were not getting enough experimental

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drama, found themselves suddenly bombarded—well, pelted, anyway —by it from all directions. Off-Broadway came up with a Beckett world première, *Happy Days,* and with N. F. Simpson's *One Way Pendulum;* Broadway offered another English import, *The Caretaker,* and a German one, *Do You Know the Milky Way?* By far the most provocative, if not entirely satisfactory, member of this quartet is *Happy Days,* whose days, I hear, are unhappily numbered. Beckett, the old fox, is becoming more and more acrobatic—or is it Aeschylean? He is steadfastly exploring how much the theatre can do without and still be theatre. He has already written a near-monodrama for actor and tape recorder, as well as a brief act without words; in *Happy Days,* as in Aeschylus's *Suppliants,* we are reduced once again to two characters, one of whom does almost all the speaking. And this protagonist is, like Aeschylus's Prometheus, immobilized. For Beckett's unfortunate heroine who stands for the human condition, stands for it buried up to her waist during act one; in act two, life has inhumed her up to her chin, and only her head is still distinguishable from the landscape. The image is striking, both visually and symbolically, but it does rather cramp one's dramatic style. Of course, it is very much part of Beckett's scheme to inhibit dramatic, i.e., human action, but the maneuver is extremely dangerous. Beckett the acrobat has hung on to his dramatic thread first by his feet, then by one hand, next by his teeth, and now he proceeds to take out his dentures in mid-air. Needless to say, he is performing without a net. And there are moments, indeed minutes, when the play lapses into *longueurs,* when the existential *ennui* becomes plain old-fashioned boredom. All the same, the play is full of that Beckettian strategy which presents the most innocuous trifles of human existence dripping with blood and bile, and the most unspeakable horrors rakishly attired and merrily winking. The heroine who keeps blithering about the great mercies of existence as she is pressed deeper and deeper into the sod is an egregiously valid theatrical metaphor—particularly as portrayed by Ruth White, whose performance is formidable in its broad outlines, and irrefutable in the accuracy of its deadly details.

One Way Pendulum is a less easily describable quantity. It is made up of satire, sophomoric jokes, malefic humor alternating with absurd drollery. There is a good deal of Ionesco and Beckett in it, and not a little of English domestic comedy with a strong odor of Terry-Thomas and Alastair Sim, which is quite all right, but also, alas, much that is labored and lumpish. A good many of the jokes are to drama what Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades are to art: at least as tiresome as they are supposed to be amusing. But behind the "honest idiocy" one often glimpses a genuine comic talent which can wrest relevance from the bizarre. Consider this exchange: "Does he have any Negro blood?"—"He does have one or two bottles in his room, but he doesn't tell me what's in them." Casually and incidentally, this dirty kick in the groin of ra-

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cial prejudice accomplishes more than a thousand *Purlie Victorious's* with their Queensberry rules. Again, when a mother questions her daughter about a skull, a gift from the boy friend, which sits on the mantelpiece, Daughter explains: "It's supposed to remind one of death." Whereat Mum mumbles: "It hasn't worked since he gave it to her!" Could there be a more modern way of questioning Death as to the whereabouts of his sting? And for those who do not weaken along the way, N. F. Simpson has reserved one of the loudest and most cathartic laughs from any playwright's medicine chest—too bad that he disburses nothing like it until the end of the play. By that time, despite some fine performances (especially by Andree Rae and Barbara Lester) and Douglas Seale's knowing direction, a veritable exodus from the auditorium has begun. Even I, as I watched the company around me getting fewer and fitter, nearly yielded to wanderlust. But I am glad I fought it back.

Not since Joanna Southcote announced that she would give birth to the Messiah, have there been such public pangs and heaving—and such a failure to produce even a *ridiculus mus*—as the Lyceum (operating) Theatre, where Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker* tossed and moaned like a parturient Ingmar Bergman heroine. We have heard this play explained by assorted mystagogues as a tragicomic excursion into the Kafkaesque realms of human non-communication; as a salty satire on the British middle class with all its prejudices, pretensions, and absurdity; as a Manichaean parable of man's existence; and as an insoluble conundrum full of fascinating and funny details. One of the producers freely admitted that he does not understand it, which, however, did not keep him from producing it; the reviewers, though they admitted nothing, gave ample evidence in their reviews of equal incomprehension, which, however, did not prevent them from praising the play to the skies.

One trouble with the various explications is that they are either too parochial or too cosmically vague; another is that they do not fit. The play abounds in every kind of mystification: disconnected speeches, non sequiturs, red herrings, paradoxes for the sheer hell of it, withheld information, unexplained oddities, and, above all, unimpregnated silences. Most of the time, the speeches seem to be carefully constructed so as to have all the superficies of sense, but a big hole where the meaning ought to be; and whatever connecting thread may have held the minuscule incidents together, has been carefully allowed to rot away. When the language happens to deviate into sense, as in the elder brother's description of how he was given shock treatment, the drabness and triviality of the writing become manifest in spite of Robert Shaw's immaculate reading of the lines.

The Caretaker, I am afraid, is very much the work of an actor who relies on his knowledge of the externals of theatre and his shallow

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awareness of contemporary trends in drama. For whereas the better experimental writers in today's theatre have mastered the uses of language and symbol, Mr. Pinter, a once and future thespian, though occasionally amusing and sometimes resourceful in thinking up effective things for his three brilliant actors to do, has no style, no ideas, no poetic fantasy with which to hold us. "Vacant and idiotic as an actress," Lawrence Durrell says of a mirror in one of his poems. This is unfairly discriminatory. For it can be applied with equal rights to most *actors,* at least when they overstep the narrow boundaries of their competence.

This brings us to our last experimental play, *Do You Know the Milky Way?* Its author, Karl Witlinger, is, according to a recent survey, the most performed contemporary playwright in Germany. This in itself does not constitute a condemnation, but *Do You Know the Milky Way?* does. We are treated (at least in this adaptation), to a Hellzapoppinish circus, nightclub turns, a play-within-a-play, a film-within-a-play, a dream-play—everything, in short, except a play-play. While Wolfgang Borchert's more interesting, though imperfect, attempt to deal with Germany's collective guilt, *Draussen vor der Tür,* still awaits viewing here, despite yearly promises, Witlinger's more commercial, saccharine confection is given a relatively opulent, overblown production.

I am not saying that this amalgam of everything from expressionism to epic theatre, from cabaret to cinemascope, does not have good intentions with which it tries to pave the way to heaven; here and there, briefly, it manages to be engaging even. But I wonder, first of all, whether diverse but hoary things can ever be slapped together into something new: plunder the nests of the most exotic birds—cassowaries, lapwings, birds of paradise—for your omelet: stale is stale, however you scramble it. Countless jokes whose point is that the psychiatrist's and patient's roles should be reversed, that the so-called sane are the truly unhinged, that the world is one big lunatic asylum, have little kick left in them. And what they have, should be directed toward the director's pants: Herbert Berghof is a master of ponderous cuteness, and his staging proceeds by a series of clubfooted pirouettes. But even if Witlinger were more of a dramatist, and Berghof a director, what could one do with lines like "He is your milkman, bringing you every morning liquid, pasteurized imagination"? Or, "If God lost sight of all his stars, if he shut his eyes even just for forty winks, they might all begin to fade. But he won't. At least, he didn't yet." I don't think that even simple faith has any business being *that* simple. As enacted by Hal Holbrook, it is positively simpering. And what of George Voskovec's tour de force? You'd never think that those dozen parts were all played by *one* actor. I didn't even think they were played by *an* actor. The most cheerful aspects of the evening were Colin Low's sets,

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and his handsomely photographed film sequence (which did, however, seem overlong—but then, what didn't?), Bill Baird's masks, and at least one of Alex Fry's melodies.

An interesting question is posed by the English translation, or adaptation, which the program credits to no one. It was, we hear from reliable sources, begun by Mr. Berghof, polished by Lyon Phelps, and revised by Gore Vidal—as well as garnished in places by still other hands. It is regrettable that so many cooks could not keep the liquid, pasteurized imagination from curdling.

We come, finally, to something that might also be considered vaguely experimental, *From the Second City*. It is cabaret done in a theatre, and in a country where there is almost no cabaret in cabarets, I suppose this venture should be welcomed. And yet production in a theatre, in which these eight young people with their often slender material seem like fighting cocks in a jousting hall, was not a felicitous move. Not only is there a difference between the company's little showcase back in Chicago and the Royale Theatre, there is an even greater difference between the Second City and the First, where competition is tougher and expectation, however foolishly, higher. Some of the material in the show is, to be sure, quite good; one number, "Museum Piece," a meeting at the Chicago Art Institute between a guitar-playing Beat and a repressed U. of Chicago co-ed, is almost flawless fun. It goes on rather long for such a sketch, and yet manages to maintain a consistent, concentrated humorousness that, without being wholly social satire or high comedy, comes close to being both. Barbara Harris and Alan Arkin perform this ultramodern museum piece like old masters; they, along with Howard Alk and, occasionally, Severn Darden, are the bright lights of the troupe. But only two or three of their other numbers can even approximate this sumptuous jest, and there are not a few items that are simply, or complicatedly, embarrassing. Nevertheless, these young people have talent: if *they* grow and their hall shrinks, the results ought to be gratifying indeed. At that point, any debate about whether or not this is theatre will become perfectly otiose.

And to think that at this time last year, when we already had *The Hostage* and *A Taste of Honey,* we dared bemoan the poverty of the theatrical season. . .

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B. H. HAGGIN

Ballet and Music Chronicle

THE LENINGRAD KIROV BALLET that appeared here last fall is the present embodiment of the company of the Maryinsky Theater of Czarist St. Petersburg—the company which Petipa trained, for which he and Ivanov created *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty* in the 1890's, and which has continued to perform these two ballets ever since. Moreover, it was the Maryinsky's school that produced Nijinsky, Pavlova, Karsavina, Fokine, and later Danilova, Doubrovska and Balanchine, who danced in the Maryinsky Theater before they joined Diaghilev's company in Western Europe and came to this country. It is, then, not only the present Kirov company that derives from the old Maryinsky, but, through Balanchine and Doubrovska, the New York City Ballet, and in some degree, through Karsavina and the dancers who settled in London and Paris to teach, London's Royal Ballet and other Western European companies.

But continuity doesn't preclude change; derivation from the same source doesn't preclude dissimilarity. There are, for one thing, the gradual but inevitable changes that occur in a company's dancing and its ballets in the course of time, which may be small. Thus Danilova after seeing the Kirov company could say that after forty years it was still the old Maryinsky—not, I am sure, because there were no changes in what it did, but because they were slight (except for the male dancer lifting the ballerina over his head, which appears to be standard practice in Soviet Russian ballet, and which I doubt that Danilova saw at the Maryinsky Theater forty years ago). On the other hand there are the changes produced by personal intervention, which may be large: whereas the Kirov still executes much the same movements, and does so with the same quiet elegance, as Danilova remembers, the New York City Ballet executes movements, and does so with an energy and sharp clarity, whose striking dissimilarity from the Kirov vocabulary and style of execution represents the impress on the traditional ballet movement and execution of the mind and imagination of Balanchine.

Concerning the Kirov *Swan Lake* that I saw first there is, then, this to say: it offered the Petipa-Ivanov choreography revised by Konstantin Sergeyev (to include a new character, a Jester, and to provide a new happy ending), which looked as though it was close to the original and which was very different from the Balanchine choreography of the second act performed by the New York City Ballet; it offered the movements of the old choreography executed in a style very different from that of the execution of the Balanchine movements; and I must

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add that it offered the old movements executed with a precision that the less adequately rehearsed New York City corps doesn't exhibit. But as against the excitingly beautiful and imaginative Balanchine movements those of the Kirov version, even performed with elegance and precision, were insipid and boring. And in the principal part Kaleria Fedicheva didn't exhibit the exquisite fluidity, elegance and distinction of the New York City's best dancers, Violette Verdy and Allegra Kent. Altogether the Kirov *Swan Lake* I saw was mediocre and uninteresting.

Not so, however, *The Sleeping Beauty*. Here there was no recollection of Balanchine's work to keep one from enjoying the Petipa choreography revised by Konstantin Sergeyev—only one's recollection of the Nicolai Sergeyev reconstruction offered by the Royal Ballet, which was similar in style and executed with a similar mild elegance. Nor did the recollection of Margot Fonteyn's unique performance as Aurora lessen one's pleasure from the loveliness of Alla Sizova's operation. Yuri Soloviev was a more brilliant Prince than Michael Somes; Inna Zubkovskaya a radiant Lilac Fairy; Sergei Vikulov and Natalia Makarova an excellent Blue Bird and Princess Florine. And the scenery, though not as beautifully imagined as Oliver Messel's for the Royal Ballet, was impressive. The Kirov *Sleeping Beauty,* then, was a memorable experience.

So was the *Giselle,* which offered technically accomplished dancing and expressive acting by Irina Kolpakova in a superb performance of the title role, better dancing than acting by Vladilen Semenov as Albrecht, a brilliant first-act peasant pas de deux by Ninel Kurgapkina and Yuri Soloviev, and beautiful work by Inna Korneyeva and the corps as Myrtha and her group of Willis in the second act.

A mixed program included two charming Petipa pieces—a short ballet, *Bayaderka,* performed well by Fedicheva and Vikulov, and a pas de deux, *The Corsair,* performed with enchanting style and dazzling virtuosity by Sizova and Soloviev. And it ended well with a Cossack number, *Taras Bulba,* put together by Boris Fenster. But the other pieces of present-day Russian choreographic invention—Vassily Vainonen's to music from Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker,* and worst of all, Leonid Yakobson's *The Hunter and the Bird* and *The Gossips*—made it clear that one should see the Russians only in the old classics.

Ballet Theater's new works included William Dollar's *Divertimento-Rossini,* a pleasant Balanchine-style classical piece to Rossini music arranged by Benjamin Britten; Birgit Cullberg's *Moon Reindeer,* which, to a noisy score of Knudaage Riisager, told its long story in movement that exhibited enormous effort and ingenuity in the achievement of the unattractive; and a work of more consequence, Harold Lander's *Etudes.* This used a score which Riisager made out of the Czerny Etudes that exercise the hand in various types of piano technique; and it offered a series of sequences which exercised the dancers

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in the movements of classical ballet—sequences which led from the simplest warming-up movements at the *barre* in a gradual crescendo of intricacy, speed and brilliance to a dazzling conclusion. It was a masterful use of the medium and was superbly executed by the soloists—notably Toni Lander and Royes Fernandez—and the corps.

Mastery is evident in Jerome Robbins' operation, but with other things that make the operation unenjoyable for me. W. J. Turner once observed that he didn't like the Brahms of the symphonic works who sets out to be a great creator and preferred the Brahms of the sequences of variations who is a mere musician. Similarly I don't like the Robbins who is a Serious Thinker About the Condition of Man and the World and produces the portentous tosh of *Events,* a new piece he presented his company in last fall. Nor do I like the Robbins who must break new paths and produces *Moves,* a "ballet in silence about relationships"—not that it doesn't include occasional striking details but that they would be even more effective with music, and that some of the movements make me squirm with their implied "relationships," as I squirmed at the exhibition of personal privacies in *Facsimile* and *The Age of Anxiety* years ago. What I don't like, that is, is some of the things that come through to one in Robbins' work—the sticky sentimentality, the excessive cuteness. And what I do like is what he produces on some of the occasions when his choreographic powers serve his perceptive mind and eye for comedy: *Fancy Free,* the Mack Sennett ballet in *High Button Shoes,* the sleepwalking sequence in *Look Ma, I'm Dancin',* and two of the pieces done by his present group, *The Concert* and *Afternoon of a Faun.* The group is an engaging one which does efficiently all the things it shouldn't have to do; but Veronika Maklar and Jay Norman or John Jones don't perform the *Faun* piece adequately for someone who has seen it done by Tanaquil LeClercq or Allegra Kent and Francisco Moncion.

The Ford Foundation, assured by the critics that its money had produced a rich sprouting of American opera whose further growth required only more of the Foundation's support, came through with a further grant; and the results of this patronage, exhibited again by the New York City Opera, elicited reviews which no doubt will persuade the Foundation to make still another grant. In Professor Paul Henry Lang's *Herald Tribune* review Douglas Moore used a "fine gift for direct musical narrative" and other talents for operatic writing to achieve in *The Wings of the Dove* a work "destined to become a . . . fixture in the American operatic repertory"; in Winthrop Sargeant's *New Yorker* review Moore achieved a work which, by virtue of "the communicative power of its music," was "the most artistically successful American opera thus far written, and . . . certainly one of the very few operas written anywhere in the past half century that seem to deserve a permanent place in the history of the art." But what Moore

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achieved in the City Center auditorium was a musical operation as inept and feeble as those of his earlier *The Devil and Daniel Webster* and *The Ballad of Baby Doe.* In the columns of *The New Yorker* Moore accomplished the "fascinating feat" of "[restoring] by the evocative power of the music" what was lost by the librettist's "[pruning] James's convoluted writing down to the simple dialogue of which an opera libretto must consist"; but in the auditorium one heard Moore playing at being a composer by using now this instrument or voice, now that one, to produce now these sounds, now those, and heard him accomplish the fascinating feat of achieving in these sounds unceasing inadequacy or irrelevancy even to the simple changed words and situations that were a falsification of James's novel. And one therefore regretted the waste of the talents and work of those involved in the production: Regina Sarfaty, Dorothy Coulter, Martha Lipton and John Reardon, who sang the principal roles; the orchestra and the conductor, Julius Rudel; Christopher West, who directed; Donald Oenslager, who designed the scenery; Patton Campbell, who did the costumes.

Robert Ward's *The Crucible,* about which Professor Lang had reservations (for one thing, "the Wagner-Strauss orchestral commentary and the 'singing opera' do not consort well together"), was a better work than Moore's—better in the greater expertness with which Ward did essentially the same thing. The composers of the American operas exhibited by the New York City Opera all have relied on what happened on the stage to capture and hold attention, and have carried this with music which in no instance has had the impress of an original creative mind, but has instead shown varying degrees of skill in the employment of a variety of existing resources for the needs of the libretto. This was what Ward did with *He Who Gets Slapped* a few years ago; and it is what he has done now with Bernard Stambler's adaptation of the Arthur Miller play and with the unoriginal but suitable music that he has put together with a skill and assurance that Moore doesn't have. Frances Bible, Chester Ludgin and Norman Treigle were among those who sang and acted well in the performance conducted effectively by Emerson Buckley and staged skilfully by Allen Fletcher, with serviceable scenery by Paul Sylbert and costumes by Ruth Morley.

Virgil Thomson once observed of a certain American that he had written lots of music, which made him a real composer, but that it had been standardized in expression and eclectic in style, which made him not a real creator. What the Ford Foundation has wanted to achieve, with its grants, and may have been led to think it has achieved, is the work of creators; what actually has been produced is the work of composers, some of them not even good composers.

As for the New York City revival of *The Marriage of Figaro,* it exhibited the usual consequences of the decision to give a Mozart comedy

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in English. I have never attended a performance of such a comedy in Italian at which the audience didn't give audible evidence of knowing what was going on and of being amused by it; but it is contended nevertheless that to make it possible for the audience to understand and be amused English must be used; and the result is English words whose sound, awkwardness and lack of distinction jar the ear in their contrast with the elegance of Mozart's music. Then the desire to make the comedy even funnier brings colloquialisms which clash with this elegance even more. And for louder laughs the stage action is heavily underscored, adding a further element of disharmony with the character of the music. It was such a combination of distinguished art in the music and coarse-grained comedy in the words and action that was presented by the New York City *Figaro;* and its disturbing effect was increased by the tastelessly amateurish scenery of H. A. Condell, the sheer scenic chaos in Act 3 contrived presumably by Gordon Micunis, the choreography devised by Robert Joffrey. As for the distinction of the music, it was realized mostly in the alertly sensitive and finished playing of the incandescent orchestral part achieved by the authoritative conducting of Walter Susskind. Possibly because of insufficient rehearsal the gearing of orchestra with singers was often unprecise; except for Frances Bible, the Cherubino, the singing—even by the singers with good voices, like Judith Raskin, the Susanna, and Doris Jung, the Countess—was undistinguished in phrasing and style; and the other voices ranged from the moderately good baritone of Norman Treigle, the Figaro, to the harsh one of William Chapman, the Count, and the inadequate bass of Spiro Males, the Dr. Bartolo. But Maurice Stern contributed an outstanding Don Basilio, and Eunice Alberts a fine Marcellina.

The Netherlands Chamber Orchestra is the newest of the small groups we have been hearing since the war—one that exhibits the unanimity and finish of fine ensemble playing, though not the tonal brilliance of the Italian groups. It appeared here with Szymon Goldberg, who is not only an accomplished solo violinist but one of the outstanding ensemble artists of our time, whose pre-war recordings of incandescent performances of Mozart sonatas with Lili Kraus and Haydn trios with Kraus and Pini are treasured by music-lovers. And what he did with the little orchestra during much of the concert was to lead it in beautiful ensemble performances—first as violin soloist, standing with face to the audience and back to the orchestra, in Bach's A-minor and Haydn's C-major Concertos, and later as one of a string quartet seated in front of the orchestra, in Mozart's Serenata Notturno K.239. In addition, as conductor facing the orchestra, he led it in similar performances of Bartok's Divertimento and Badings' Adagio and Allegro for string orchestra—pieces competently put together that I found uninteresting.

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PATRICK CRUTTWELL

Romantics and Victorians

I HAVE EIGHT BOOKS HERE,[1] seven of them on Romantic and Victorian poetry: books on Coleridge and Wordsworth, Keats and Byron, Tennyson and Rossetti and Arnold. And one on Burns, who is neither Romantic nor Victorian and who will do as "control" if we are thinking of performing an experiment on poetry in the Romantic tradition. For it happens that while these books were crossing the Atlantic for my perusal, and while I was reading them, I was reading also in Yvor Winters, working my way through most of his criticism and some of his verse with a view to writing about him. Winters is surely the most consistent and cogent anti-Romantic critic of today, and it has occurred to me that what he has said of Romantic poetry would do very well as tests, alike for the poetry itself and for these books about it.

Winters argues that the English lyric went wrong some time about the end of the seventeenth century, and did so because it lost the structural backbone which medieval logic had supplied; it came under the influences of Shaftesburian Deism, and thereafter it was organized on a basis not of reason but of emotional associations. Instead of a work of art, then, what we get is a fragment of the author's consciousness, a piece of his emotional autobiography. The work cannot stand alone, cannot be judged alone; it must lean on an interest in its author's personality. Our interest in it—and in him—no longer depends on whether or not, as we think, it has expressed a truth, but on whether or not we find it has expressed its author. Reason is therefore not involved in this interest; what the poem says and the poet believes may be utter nonsense, may be pernicious nonsense, but if the nonsense is expressive, the poem may be just as good a poem as if it talked sense. This corruption, as Winters sees it, lasted throughout the eighteenth century, on to the heyday of Romanticism, and into the poetry of the Victorians; only with Bridges and Hardy are there signs of a return to intelligence.

[1] THE DARK NIGHT OF SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE, by *Marshall Suther*. Columbia University Press. $5.00. THE CONSECRATED URN, by *Bernard Blackstone*. Longmans Green. $9.50. THE SIMPLE WORDSWORTH, by *John F. Danby*. Barnes and Noble. $3.50. BYRON AND THE SPOILER'S ART, by *Paul West*. St. Martin's Press. $4.00. TENNYSON, THE GROWTH OF A POET, by *Jerome Hamilton Buckley*. Harvard University Press. $5.75. THE VOICES OF MATTHEW ARNOLD, by *W. Stacy Johnson*. Yale University Press. $4.50. A VICTORIAN ROMANTIC, D. G. ROSSETTI, by *Oswald Doughty*. Oxford University Press. $8.00. BURNS, by *Thomas Crawford*. Stanford University Press. $6.50.

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One thing these books make very clear. We are perfectly justified in thinking of Romantic and Victorian verse as one tradition. The Victorians, in poetry, added nothing really new. They could never escape from the shadow of their predecessors. Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites, says Doughty in his biography of Rossetti, agreed that "Keats had carried English verse to the limits of its finest possibilities" —and if they had qualified that by adding "the limits for *our* capacities," they would have been right. *They* could go no further than Keats; neither, in essentials, could Tennyson or Swinburne. For Keats had reached the point of maximum yield in the cultivation of verbal sensuousness; had seen, himself, that that field was not enough; but had died before he could act on his knowledge. His followers continued along the road which he would have left.

So we may think of these poets, in spite of their differences, as not inappropriately together, not wrongly judged by the same criteria. A kind of poetry, on the whole, gets the kind of criticism it asks for; that is another thing these books make clear. The poetry forces the criticism to conform with it, if the criticism is to say anything at all about the poetry, make any sort of contact with it. And many of these books confirm Winters' judgment in one respect. They are not considering the poems they deal with as works of art, but as documents, as revelations; they are not judging, they are interpreting. Again and again—this is especially true of Suther's book on Coleridge and Blackstone's on Keats—the quality of the passage being considered is obviously irrelevant to what the critic is doing with it, to his reasons for quoting it. For instance:

> "The Gentle Look" (1793?) is another evening poem in which the evening-moon image operates as an ambivalent symbol of sadness and joy:
>
> Thou gentle Look, that didst my soul beguile,
> Why hast thou left me? Still in some fond dream
> Revisit my sad heart, auspicious Smile!
> As falls on closing flowers the lunar beam:
> What time in sickly mood, at parting day,
> I lay me down and think of happier years;
> Of joys, that glimmer'd in Hope's twilight ray,
> Then left me in a darkling vale of tears.
>
> The moonbeam is again, as in the lines "Imitated from Ossian," the symbol of mysterious communion, but the joy associated with the moon-world is already a fragile, evanescent joy.

This is from Suther's book on Coleridge. Now I cannot believe that Suther, if you asked him, would deny that these lines of Coleridge's are beneath contempt; I cannot believe that he would ever dream of including them in any anthology, however large, of English poetry or

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of showing them to a class of Creative Writing except as a Bad Example. But he neither says so nor has any need to say so. He is not displaying them to show how vilely Coleridge could write; he is displaying them to enforce his point about the "evening-moon image" as "ambivalent symbol." With such criticism, quality need not exist. Similarly with Blackstone on Keats; the point of *The Consecrated Urn* is not to demonstrate which of Keats's poems are great and successful and which are not, and why, but to prove that Keats held certain mystical doctrines which he had picked up from Erasmus Darwin, neo-Platonism, William Blake, and the tradition of Hermetic mumbo-jumbo. ("Mumbo-jumbo" is my word, not Blackstone's.) The question is: does the poetry of the Romantic tradition deserve (as well as invite) this kind of criticism?

In a sense, it does. For a basic tendency of Romantic poetry is to want to be more than poetry. It wants to be religion. This is the central point both of Suthers on Coleridge and of Blackstone on Keats. Each presents his subject as mystic or sage rather than artist. Suthers does so regretfully; he argues from a neo-Thomist viewpoint derived through Maritain, and sees Coleridge as having ruined his poetic gift by confusing the "poetic experience" with the "properly mystical experience." Blackstone is approving; he admires Keats enormously, is determined to prove him a mystic, and for that end is ready to be very cavalier with facts, or lack of facts. For the bridge on which his whole argument should move—Keats's knowledge of the Platonic-Hermetic mysticism—is just not there at all: it is surmise. And take a passage like this—a very typical passage:

> Hence the importance, as we shall come more and more to see, of the plastic in his work; of the consecrated urn standing as image of the finished form, of the bowl of the sky within which the processes of becoming and ceasing-to-be unfold themselves. Both are receptacles; both are symbols of unawareness, of detachment, of the ultimate. Voidness is integral to both. Overwrought with the brede of marble men and maidens, the Urn yet functions essentially as a resonant hollow. The sky seems blue, but it is our atmosphere which provides the colour. In the Mahayana scriptures the void is the common symbol of ultimate Reality. . . .

The *facts* are that Keats wrote, on occasions, about urns and about skies; but that he wrote about them with these thoughts and intentions is not fact. It is not even surmise well-grounded. It is a kind of interpreter's reverie, for which Keats's poems are no more than the starting-point. Yet we may concede that this poetry, with its strange dense lushness hiding—hiding what? that is just the problem: the sticky daydreams of adolescence or a vision of truth?—Keats's poetry does provoke such interpretative fantasies. And so does Coleridge's; and so does Shelley's. Because, to some degree, the poems themselves are

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fantasies—which may seem at moments, to sympathetic readers, like the gospels of some undefined religion. "Poets," wrote Shelley—and wrote it seriously—"are the hierophants of an unapprehended revelation."

This is perhaps what we might expect from the early Romantics, from the men of *Sturm und Drang* and the years of revolution. It is odd to find it in a Victorian Inspector of Schools, a great diner-out, a pillar of society; but we do find it there. Matthew Arnold was as sure as Shelley that poetry could do what orthodox religion was failing to do, though he expressed it more decorously and more moderately. But what a muddle he was in! Stacy Johnson's *Voices of Matthew Arnold* describes it, adequately if unexcitingly. He confirms Yvor Winters on one point; he sees that the principle which Arnold's verse is built on is often that of personal association, of the "speaker's mind as it wanders." All Arnold's successes are of this kind; when he tried to write the "classical" verse which his theories demanded, what he wrote was dead. But even into his best poems what a restricted part of his mind can find admittance! His verse is much more hesitant, confused, subdued and unhappy than his critical and polemical prose; nowhere in it can one find the jaunty buoyancy of *Culture and Anarchy*. He, at least, is scarcely the "hierophant" of a "revelation," unapprehended or not; he is the lamenter that he does not have a revelation to impart. But that, he feels, no less than Shelley, is what he should have. He was inhibited by self-doubt and an inbuilt scepticism; his endless imagery of streams and oceans—water surging and pouring, restlessly, pointlessly—is his verse's way of saying it. He too, in his own way, confused the poetic experience with the mystical. For his saints and prophets and guides, he looked to the poets, to Sophocles and to Goethe—and to Wordsworth.

But Wordsworth, for all that he skirted the boundary of Romantic mysticism, never really crossed it. There was something in him too tough, too down to earth, perhaps too peasant-cautious; he drew back before the final leap from commonsense just as he did from total involvement in revolutionary politics. Danby in *The Simple Wordsworth* rightly sees him as "still in the great Renaissance tradition which saw in the poet a responsible human spokesman," and sees also that this puts him in a different country from that of Keats. Keats's poetry is "outside the Renaissance tradition completely"; his is the poetry not of "moral profit" but of sensuous daydream; it will end, says Danby, "in one direction, with the psychoanalyst's couch, and, in another, with poetry as a kind of therapy." Danby's book makes that point well (though it does so in a manner repetitive and wholly); it brings out how much of the eighteenth century there was in Wordsworth, how objective and humorous he could be, how genuinely interested in other human beings. Not surprising, then, that Wordsworth thought little of the real Romantics—had a low opinion of Keats

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(returned with interest) and a lower still of Byron. Byron, indeed, he really hated (his letters show that), for he saw in Byron's personality and his verse and the immense success of both a menace to that sober integrity of feeling which for him was the basis of true morality no less than of good poetry. For to Wordsworth as to Dr. Johnson—and to Dr. Winters—the roots of both were the same.

But was Wordsworth right—to hate Byron? Was Byron really the vulgarizer, the debaucher of sensibility, the fraudulent exhibitionist, that Wordsworth thought him? Byron himself did not know the answer; at moments he would have pleaded guilty, really thought himself, and his poetry, worthless compared with Johnson and Pope and their poetry, popular only because the public was degenerate. But his self-depreciation was as erratic as his vanity, no less dependent on the moment's whim. It was not true self-criticism. Paul West's *Byron and the Spoiler's Art* agrees that Byron's feeling for his own art was basically frivolous. "He wrote to entertain his age and . . . himself . . . Poetry . . . was an extension of diurnal excitement . . . never more than the manipulable by-product of a seething spirit." He "was fond of judging and proclaiming, but he was not a literary critic." West tries to salvage Byron on two counts: first, by seeing him as a comic poet, not a Romantic, as "a realist and a jester" with "farcical gifts"; second, by attempting to detach Byron's verse from his personality. With the first, I would agree; it is clearly only the satirical Byron that is savable at all. But as for the second, West's book itself throws doubt on it, since the Byronic personality will keep breaking in on the discussion of the verse; refuge must be taken in the doubtfully meaningful suggestion that "sincerity in the form of acute self-consciousness took over." Perhaps it is uneasiness about this which accounts for West's feverish efforts to be contemporary and to make Byron contemporary. "He anticipated Lionel Trilling's inquiry into *The Opposing Self,* David Riesman's analysis of *The Lonely Crowd* and Camus's cult of rebellion. Indeed, without frivolity, one might say that *Marino Faliero* anticipates *Death of a Salesman. . . .*" Without frivolity, perhaps; but also, I fear, without meaning. Still, West's book is a gallant effort to put the case for Byron's poetry as literature, as poetry alone, for a reader of today; if it fails, as I think it does, it fails because that poetry just will not, cannot, stand up by itself. It has to lean on the letters and journals, and they on the man behind them; and if interest of that sort is vulgar, is unliterary, so be it: for Byron, it is the only interest.

—As the young Tennyson knew, when he carved in the sandstone, on hearing the news from Missolonghi, *Byron is dead.* But it was not for long that Byron was the dominant Romantic. His fame sank swiftly when the personal legend was no more added to; Keats's and Shelley's rose as his sank, and they were the models whom Tennyson followed. It was Tennyson's role—and Tennyson's destruction—to

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make Romanticism palatable to the Victorians. A hard job: indeed an impossible job, if he and his readers had looked honestly at what they were following—at Shelley's outrageous radicalism and Keats's lowborn Cockney sensuality. But they did not look honestly; the radicalism was presented as an endearingly youthful whim and the sensuality as a luscious verbalism. English Romanticism became respectable, and Tennyson was the man who did it.

But respectable Romanticism is a contradiction in terms. Romanticism is a defiance of society; when it comes to terms with society, it is not simply weakened or compromised; it is finished. Something else may continue, dressed in the clothes of Romanticism and using its language: but it must be a sham. That was Tennnyson. Jerome Hamilton Buckley's *Tennyson, the Growth of a Poet* fights hard for him, is convinced of his greatness, and pleads for it with a sounding sequence of clichés: "dedication to the poet's calling, command of his medium, range of vision, capacity for growth, etc."—eminent question-beggers, most of them, for what did he say through his medium? what did he see with his vision? where did his growth grow up to? Those are the questions to be asked; and I fear that for me Buckley's book does not answer them—certainly not in the sense it would wish. To tell the truth, it is a very dull book; it plods grimly on from poem to poem; it seems to have no centre, no viewpoint. Perhaps that is largely its subject's fault. For what such a survey of the whole of Tennyson brings out most clearly is the irremediable vulgarity of his mind. Whenever he thought about any topic that was of current interest, his judgment was the conventional judgment, his mood the conventional mood. With the jingoism of the 1850's ("Form, form, Riflemen, form!"); with the philistinism of the 1860's ("Art for Art's sake! Hail, truest Lord of Hell!"); with the prudery which denounced the realistic novels from France in the 1880's ("See the maiden fancies wallowing in the troughs of Zolaism!")—with all these he agreed as hysterically, uncritically, *ignorantly*, as Queen Victoria herself. I believe the clue may be found in a phrase by which a contemporary described the Bohemianism of Tennyson's early years. "Genteel vagrancy," this contemporary called it. However vagrant, he was always genteel. The Romantic passion had become an affectation.

Suther's book on Coleridge reinforces that conclusion. He argues—rightly, I think—that the trouble with Coleridge's Romanticism, and with English Romanticism in general, was simply that it did not go far enough. Having staked its money on defiance of society, on the unique sensibility of the splendidly lonely individual, it then lost its nerve; tried to withdraw part of its stake; and made a fool of itself. The Romanticism of the Continent, Suther suggests, provides the illuminating contrast. Rimbaud did not lose his nerve, but went all the way; so, in their own styles, did Baudelaire and Verlaine. The *end* of the way may look—may be—both degrading and ridiculous;

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but at least it has the dignity of being consistent with the start. To begin as a "vagrant" and end as Queen Victoria's Laureate is neither dignified nor consistent; it is just—ordinary. It is like being a beatnik bestseller—justifiably suspect.

Bohemianism doesn't suit the English. It may be debatable whether this is because they have too much sense or too little courage, too much humor or too much philistinism: the fact remains, it doesn't suit them. The Victorian English least of all; yet in the very heyday of Victorianism, in the roast-beef-and-pudding-and-Trollope middle years of the century, rose that strange doomed effort at a Bohemian "life for art," Rossetti and his pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Oswald Doughty's admirable biography, *A Victorian Romantic,* gives it all, through the life of its central figure; it is a book more of facts than interpretations, but even the least analytical reader will be stimulated to attempt his own interpretation of the facts. Why did talents so remarkable—for such, beyond doubt, were Rossetti's—lead, on the whole, to such unsatisfying achievements? Why did the art of himself and his followers turn out in the end to be no more than a stagnant backwater, enjoyable only for its period interest and the melancholy charm of failure—while in painting the live tradition went on from French Impressionism, which the pre-Raphaelites hated and despised, and in poetry from models such as Hopkins and Hardy, whose verse was the antithesis of theirs? The answers emerge from Doughty's book. Neither Rossetti's aestheticism nor his Bohemianism was whole-hearted. He would never submit himself to the discipline of learning his craft; all his life, he was technically amateurish. And his Bohemianism, like Tennyson's, was simply a mode of acting; in truth he was, as Doughty says, "largely subservient at heart to the conventional standards of the time, if not even approving them in considerable degree." Like Tennyson too, he was grotesquely insular and jingoist; the sight of the can-can in Paris moved him to transports of hysterical indignation. You cannot serve the God of Romanticism and the Mammon of respectability; if your art is to be the art of defiance, your life must be the same. You must spit at the bourgeois like Flaubert; blaspheme against patriotism like Rimbaud; wreck your own prospects like Baudelaire. The worst Rossetti could do was a gesture of melodrama—burying his poems with his mistress. And even that he later revoked.

There remains one poet on my list: Robert Burns. Let me record at once, before I run away from it, my immediate and spontaneous response to reading about him in the midst of all these others. He seemed the one sane man among the lot of them. The one man whose responses to living were normal, cheerful and vigorous; the one man whose feet were firmly on the ground; the one man who knew more of life (the grim life of a Scottish tenant-farmer) than writing poetry about it; the one man who was genuinely, unselfconsciously rooted in a real community. And therefore, the one man who, as a writer, scarcely

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needs "interpretation." I said before that kinds of writing get the kinds of criticism they deserve: Burns's kind of writing deserves Thomas Crawford's study. It is clear, sensible, knowledgeable, devoid alike of sentimentality and of patriotic ecstasies. I find it, as I find its subject, really much more convincing than I find most of these other books and their subjects—more attractive too, sounder models for human thought and conduct, nearer approximations to a healthy relationship between writer and public, between writer and critic and public. I am not suggesting—this would be ridiculous—that Burns was a greater poet than the others; it is obvious that in most things his powers were smaller, his range narrower, his medium cruder. But I do mean that the way in which he made poetry, the motives for which he made it and the interests it satisfied, were healthier and more rational than is usual in Romanticism. Burns did not drag the limelit pageant of a bleeding heart all over Europe; he wrote honest poems straightforwardly celebrating the lusts, amusements, frustrations, hatreds and triumphs of his life. His verse does not deal in the "huge cloudy symbols of a high romance"; it deals in the actualities of everyday living. He was neither aesthete nor Bohemian nor rebel nor mystagogue; he was a working member of a society which he was free to criticize, make fun of, blaspheme against, if he wished to, but which he neither disowned nor despised.

I began with Yvor Winters' critique of Romanticism. Have I ended by agreeing with it? Yes and no. I agree that the poetry of Romanticism, when you compare it with that of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, does seem to be a far more chancy business; the probability of success seems smaller, and therefore the reader's confidence becomes less (because the writer's was less). The whole thing takes on an air of nervous instability, and a kind of sympathetic intimacy grows up, or seems to, between reader and writer, so that the former has the delusion almost of sharing with the latter in the agonies of making the poem. Impossible to imagine a poet of Donne's time making a poem out of his own inability to make poetry: as Coleridge does in his *Dejection Ode*. This intimacy becomes an excusing; writer says to reader: "I can't write as good a poem as I would like to, because—" and then follow his reasons, which are themselves the poem. And reader replies to writer: "I understand you; I see why you have failed; but your failures move me more than others' successes." It is remarkable how many quintessentially Romantic poems are like that: Shelley's *West Wind* and *Skylark,* for instance, the former saying *"If* the wind would make me its lyre . . ." the latter *"If* I had the lark's 'harmonious madness'. . . ," and both agreeing *"Then,* what poems I would write!" And Keats's *Nightingale* and *Grecian Urn:* aren't they both, essentially, dreams of conditions (out of the world with the bird, back in Greece with the urn) in which he could make a happy and perfect poetry? And later, among the Victorians: Arnold's *Scholar Gypsy* is another

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(what does it all say but "We moderns are far too sad and complex to write healthy poetry"?), and so is the seventy-sixth poem of *In Memoriam* ("What hope is here for modern rhyme?"). For such poetry, the kind of criteria appropriate to, say, Herbert's *Church Monuments* (Winters' favourite example) seem simply irrelevant: of course such criteria will condemn such poetry. The question is: can we accept that condemnation as final? And that means: do we accept Winters' critical "absolutism," his conviction that there does exist a set of values permanently applicable to all poetry, and that these values exist in God?

This is where my yes begins to turn into no. Yes, that Romantic poetry is basically different from what preceded it and calls for a different reading and judging. Yes, that as literary art it is less satisfying and less accomplished. But I cannot see that belief in God must include belief that God is a literary critic; and to be interested only in poems when considered as works of art, totally detached from their creators, may seem an admirable ideal, but in practice what it leads to is a dilettante eccentricity. When Winters affirms that Barnabe Googe and George Turberville were better poets than Byron, I don't think it is merely my conventionality which is shocked; I am shocked because it seems that here a principle has been pushed to the point of absurdity. And it has become absurd because it excludes far too much. Too many people, and among them some of the best, have been moved by Byron too long and too deeply for us to be able to exclude him without a qualm. And what is true of Byron is true of other Romantic poetry. In it, and in the reading and admiring of it, is expressed an immense amount of the human experience of the last two hundred years; if the experience was such (unformed, egoistic, half-comprehended) that it could be expressed only through a kind of poetry resistant to the canons which Winters would apply, then what was the alternative? Not to express it at all, presumably. But we cannot have the last two hundred years of Western life undone for us. There it is, a fact. If we are to understand ourselves, we must understand this fact; and we cannot do it without the help of those who were in it and contributed to make it. Their failures and incoherencies, their self-analyses and self-excuses, are parts of the fact and parts of the explanation of the fact. This, I recognize, is a defence of Romantic poetry which approaches the historical; it is saying, almost, that this poetry must be given up as art but accepted as documentary. I have no objection to saying it—almost.

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JAMES DICKEY

Toward a Solitary Joy[1]

THE BATTLES OF ART are silent, bloodless, and usually result in defeats more total than any others. This is especially true of poetry, where the writer has virtually no audience at all, and puts in his hours, almost always after other work, in dogged misery, determined to realize himself and to communicate even if there is no one to communicate with. It is heartbreaking, truly. And yet, like everything else, it has its good side. Nothing else on earth can equal the profound and upsurging sense of personal justification that a good line or a good poem gives one, and, in the dead quiet after midnight or the groggy dawn when the poet seizes whatever time he can to get that new, promising poem together, he can be assured that this feeling will come again, maybe tomorrow, maybe next month, maybe next year, if he sticks at it. The carping of critics matters very little beside this, though critics are doubtless bothersome enough, for the poet's "place in the literature of his time," his place in the anthologies and textbooks that are his only Valhalla, are largely determined by what people, professionally knowledgeable people, think and say about him in public. Yet literary vanity disappears in the light of the truly creative moment; the hard-scrabble labor of writing poems is quite literally its own reward. The major good of writing a poem is done to the poet, and if a faint radiation of this central good gets as far away as somebody else, that is extra. But nobody can really count on it. Therefore, without being asked, I encourage all bad poets as well as good ones to write, and for the rest of their lives, for whatever is in it for them. My comments, such as they are, can't touch *them,* really, and I only offer what seems to be reasonable advice to help some of them toward that lonely, unfathomable rising of joy between teaching Chaucer and freshman composition, or at night after grading papers, or on the commuter train to Scarsdale.

Thomas Vance, who is a teacher, must have had these bursts of happiness a great many times, as I did when I read his first book. Through

[1] SKELETON OF LIGHT, by *Thomas Vance.* University of North Carolina Press. $3.50. THE BLUEBELLS and Other Verse, by *John Masefield.* Macmillan. $5.00. THE GARDENER, by *John Hall Wheelock.* Scribners. $3.00. POETS OF TODAY VIII: *Albert Herzing, John M. Ridland, David R. Slavitt.* Scribners. $3.95. THE LOVEMAKER, by *Robert Mezey.* The Cummington Press. No Price Listed. THE ROYAL TIGER'S FACE, by *Marvin Solomon.* Contemporary Poetry. $3.00. THE NETS, by *Paul Blackburn.* Trobar Books. $1.00. EIGHTY-FIVE POEMS, by *Louis MacNeice.* Oxford. $3.50. SOLSTICES, by *Louis MacNeice.* Oxford. $3.50. WEEP BEFORE GOD, by *John Wain.* St. Martin's Press. $2.95. IN THE STONEWORKS, by *John Ciardi.* Rutgers University Press. $3.50. VERSIONS FROM FYODOR TYUTCHEV, by *Charles Tomlinson.* Oxford. $1.70.

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mastering them completely, Vance has moved far beyond the commonplaces of current practice; his diction is simple and unpretentious, and he says big things not only quietly, but very easily and gracefully. His ballads after the Swedish are extremely interesting, and his poems about ghosts and spirits are better (*I* think) than de la Mare's. He speaks with grave dignity, and with what I can only call a kind of justice, and his poems are everywhere solid, sensitive, and deeply realized:

Silence has sealed the sun;
Trees, rocks are rooted still;
The hills look steady, stars
Wheel slow around the pole,

As if the world, being sure,
Need not set terror loose,
But held in perfect form
The poise of emptiness

Shattered. Fallen, ashen leaves
Are cradling the cold seed;
The Bear, stripped, still as ice,
Yet burns the summer's blood.

The assured and meaningful life of Mr. Vance's poems has no counterpart in the work of John Masefield. There is nothing in these gentle old verses with even, say, the healthy clarity of the last stanza of Masefield's fifty-year-old *Dauber*. They are all official poems, murmuring dutifully like a laureate about kings and English history, and showing nothing but a pleasant, undisturbed flow and the ability, more a curse than a blessing, to demonstrate "by living example" that poetry can be a reflex like any other; when the bell rings, the lines start to roll. Anyone who likes may read them, but I, O Lord, no more.

John Hall Wheelock's *Gardener* is something else again. It is the best book of his I have read, a tremendously heartening advance in a man who is old enough to have seen Whitman on the Brooklyn Ferry and has been writing verse for sixty years. Known most of his life as a pure but somewhat thin lyrical talent with his roots in the nineties, Wheelock has lately developed an intense, low-keyed form of speech which he uses to examine the vanished but ever-present world of his own past, and this approach shows itself here to be capable of moving and sometimes wonderful things. "The Gardener" is a beautiful poem despite some archaic diction, and so is the very long "House in Bonac," in which Wheelock explores the theme of enslavement to the past and to revery in a surpassingly powerful and utterly convincing fashion. There is still a certain blurred quality in all but the best of Wheelock's work, but everywhere the sharp edges of reality are

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emerging unmistakably, coming upward from the depths of an intelligent and compassionate mind. That is good, if anything in poetry is.

Wheelock has edited *Poets of Today* for Scribners for the past eight years. The best things about most of these volumes are his long introductory essays, which are likably unacademic and make a good many valid comments on poetry and on the creative process. The poets are an odd bunch, a few excellent, others perfectly acceptable as far as they go, which is not far enough, and the rest, a good quarter of the total, simply awful. Of the three present writers, Herzing is bright, clear, and lively, with an adolescent energy that would be hard for anyone to dislike; I for one like it very much. Ridland is one of the most completely lifeless poets I have come across since O. B. Hardison, Jr., in the same series, and David Slavitt is not much better, though of the two I would certainly pick him if I had to. All told, this is one of the weakest volumes of an in-and-out series, and I have heard rumors that it is the last. I am glad that *Poets of Today* has made available books by Louis Simpson, Spencer Brown, May Swenson, Joseph Langland, Jon Swan and Albert Herzing, but I will wonder until my dying day whether this is a good enough average for such a lengthy publishing venture. Perhaps my doubts are caused simply by the fact that there are never really enough good poets to go around, this or any other year.

Robert Mezey is right in there with the rest of the poets of his generation, having studied "with John Crowe Ransom at Kenyon College and Paul Engle at the University of Iowa," and with this book has won the Lamont Poetry Prize, surely the most infallible badge of accepted-and-forgotten mediocrity our culture can bestow. Between the Yale Series of Younger Poets (if you feel in the mood for a sad, unbelieving laugh, look at Yale's list all the way back to the beginning, and *read* a few of the books) and the Lamont Prize, given to the likes of Ned O'Gorman and Donald Justice, I don't believe we could choose, and I'm glad we don't have to; both show the dismal state of our verse, and both go on awarding and publishing as though it mattered. This, of course, isn't Mr. Mezey's fault. And it isn't as though he can't write, either. He can; he writes very well, and he's not entirely school-gelded. The trouble is that the quality of his thought isn't much. His ideas are not interesting—at least not to me—and his commitment to experience is not deep and passionate enough, however much he may talk about passion and all its works, and is only connected to language at all because it is so easy, once you have learned, to connect "life" and words at a superficial level. I quote out of context because I haven't room for a whole poem, but one should be able to judge something of a poet's larger movements by his smaller ones:

I am in love with you—
And the moon, so lately spent,

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Will kiss your immaculate stillness
In the dark pond of my consent.

Anyone could have fastened on such commonplaces and made them rhyme. But why should anyone want to? It is the *compulsion* to write one way rather than another, to say what one has to say in one way rather than another, the personal necessity for it, that makes good poets. And this Mezey seems to me to lack. He must struggle for the painful ground where his personality and the English language can inflict wounds on each other, and not lie down together like the lion and the lamb, not even suspicious at the beginning.

I like Marvin Solomon's book better than I did Mezey's, though it is much the same kind of thing. Some of it is clearly and comically dreadful, like "Unicorns move furtively among / The aspidistras, while ladies take their ices / On the terrace, cooling their thoughts / With talk of dresses. . . ." One imagines Mr. Eliot turning away in uneasy astonishment, resolving to endorse D. H. Lawrence at last. And yet Mr. Solomon's work has a good deal of fastidious energy, though it is largely devoted to descriptions of paintings and musical compositions. I miss some good poems of his from old issues of *Poetry,* particularly one about a deep woods in which there is no wind, which I intend to look up and read again, one of these days. Miss Miller's Contemporary Poetry Series should be encouraged, and those who haven't yet bought one of her nicely-made books would do well to begin with Solomon's careful experiences. Some of them, particularly "The Animal," are worth having.

Paul Blackburn's *The Nets* is also worth buying. It sounds authentically amateurish and determined that all hell shall not keep it from speaking out loud—and *damned* loud. These characteristics it shares with some beat poetry. I notice, too, that Blackburn publishes with the beats, though I wish he wouldn't. I think he gets too well and vitally into his subjects to keep such company. He does so, in fact, often enough to be called "exciting"—though perhaps only by me—and seldom uses his material merely as an excuse to rave.

. . . and the swimmer
heading out into the bay
arm lift, plunge down, the head turning . . .

That is seen; that is done. One is inclined to ask with Blackburn, "Why / are we not this real / intensity forever?" Well, I don't know; it's his question, so it must be his answer, too. I can't help hoping that the answer comes in the form of more poems like "The Purse-Seine," which I think is a real poem, and all Blackburn's.

In several important ways Louis MacNeice is my favorite poet of the Auden era, though even to state it in this manner indicates how inferior he is to Auden both as a poet and as an influence. I must

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admit, too, that I have been and am greatly attracted by MacNeice's modest and sensible statements about poets and poetry, and about his own stake in the game, so that I have always *wanted* to like him, and to find in his writing the qualities that he consciously tries to embody in it. In the introduction to his 1940 collected *Poems,* he says "I write poetry not because it is smart to be a poet but because I enjoy it, as one enjoys swimming or swearing, and also because it is my road to freedom and knowledge." This strikes me as a healthy and valuable approach to poetry, and MacNeice's Drydenian, superbly rational style embodies it as well as any style could. No one else of his generation has raised common sense to such eminence, has turned it on so many areas of contemporary experience, has drawn such lucid and thoughtful conclusions by means of it. He has not Auden's large implications and penetration, but within his limits he is masterful. His loose, conversational idiom is in fact severely classical in structure, deliberately slangy as much of it is; it never means more than what it says, and never less. On the other hand, there is a certain breeziness that I find more and more irritating as I reread MacNeice, for it comes to seem the breeziness not only of the disillusioned intellectual, but of a rather patronizing superiority; it often seems that MacNeice could not have the attitudes that make his poems unless the world furnished him objects to contemplate at an uninvolved, somewhat disdainful distance from which he always, somehow, still manages to talk as though he were in the thick of things. Again, he inclines too much toward fashionable jargonizing which dates quickly, though it always seems timely and even prophetic at the time it is written. In the new poems in *Solstices* as well as in the old ones of *Eighty-five Poems* there is too much listing and cataloguing, too much lumping things together and not paying sufficient attention to any of them, too much easy sliding from one detail to another, passing over and through without touching. There are too many things used as "instances" of something or other, illustrations, counters to be moved around in a poem. Poetic discipline, at least as he conceives it, sits easily on MacNeice and he adopts one form or another simply as it amuses him to do so, all being equally available to a skill which never seems skill at all, but merely the pleasure of speaking, at that moment, in that particular way. That is why there is so *much* of MacNeice, and why so little of it is really memorable. The medium of verse is *too* ready to serve him. Common sense is, after all, not inspiration, not intuition. It is only common sense, and (paraphrasing a remark from the old Keith circuit), the trouble with common sense is that it's so damned common. MacNeice has been and is always well-informed and readable, and he is an authentic master of the committed, non-committed, ironic tone which has been passing with us for the true voice of twentieth century man. This is much, for who would want the future to remember us from the "prophetic" poems of George Barker? But in the end reason pulling

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energetically at its own bootstraps, half-smiling and intelligent, is not enough. Not really.

The poets of MacNeice's generation made available to later writers the informed, understated, topical tone, and the poem which is like an intellectual newspaper reporter's broodings over the things, the *real* things, which he was not allowed to put in his story that day. Both John Ciardi and John Wain have adopted this method for their own purposes. Ciardi is full of brassy everydayness and bounce. I have always been partial to Ciardi's work, though I can't take a whole book of it at a time. His main fault is still a determined straining for effect, and the seizing-on of odd comparisons as if their oddness and the mere fact that they have never been used before automatically qualified them as matter for poetry.

> A twilight of opal hazes
> muffles the day shut,
> brushing with clear glazes
> the lawn, the cube-cut
> privet, the licorice street,
> the metal-colored fleet
> in the parking lot,
> each box a ceramic yacht.

I think I can see the stuffed owl peering through the branches above this stanza, undecided whether to carry it off to an anthology of bad poetry. Yet this is probably Ciardi's best book, and, if it contains passages as uninterestingly "interesting" as the above, it also has such good Ciardi poems as "Back Home in Pompeii" and "Faces." If he were not so determined not be caught in a banality, or if he would find some less commonplace means of evading the ordinary, Ciardi would be a very impressive writer, for the guts and the drive are there.

I have never cared for John Wain in his role as one of the "Angries," which I like to imagine was thrust on him. On the other hand I am very favorably impressed with him as a writer, and particularly as a poet. I like his new book tremendously, not only because it contains some bewildered and affectionate poems as well as the sharp, amusing ones we expect from him, but because in it he has written one poem which our century owed it to itself to write, and up until now hasn't. It is "A Song About Major Eatherly," the Texas pilot of the aircraft which carried the second atomic bomb and dropped it on Nagasaki, and who subsequently (or consequently) went mad, was treated and released, then became a petty thief and ended in Fort Worth prison. Wain's approach is just right for this theme: the wryness that comes from total helplessness, and the trembling anger which is the property of no "movement" but is purely that of an outraged human being, driven past all limits by his part in the general guilt of which Eatherly's dilemma is the exposed nerve:

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O give his pension to the storekeeper.
Tell him it is the price of all our souls.
But do not trouble to unlock the door
and bring the Major out into the sun.
Leave him: it is all one: perhaps his nightmares
grow cooler in the twilight of the prison.
Leave him; if he is sleeping, come away.
But lay a folded paper by his head,
nothing official or embossed, a page
torn from your notebook, and the words in pencil.
Say nothing of love, or thanks, or penitence:
say only "Eatherly, we have your message."

I don't know Russian, and if I did I would try to forget it, so as not to interfere with my pleasure in reading Charles Tomlinson's "versions" (he doesn't call them translations) of Fyodor Tyutchev, the nineteenth century Russian poet much admired by Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, then forgotten, then resurrected by Blok, Pasternak and others when symbolism made its belated appearance in Russian verse. With a major assist from Henry Gifford, Tomlinson has selected and rendered thirty-seven of these strange, still poems, and the results are rewarding in a way translations rarely are. Tomlinson's withdrawn, meticulous and scholarly-accurate diction makes of Tyutchev an English as well as a Russian poet; it is hard to believe that these pieces are translations, though they don't sound like Tomlinson's own poems, either. The reader must conclude that Tomlinson and Tyutchev (and Gifford) have met in the Great Good Place where all translators and makers of versions should go: where the individual characteristics of the translator's own style and personality give him a profound rapport with his subject without devouring it, as, say, Roy Campbell's Baudelaire is devoured by Campbell's style. It would be too much to say that Tomlinson and Tyutchev are alike; I'm sure they aren't. But their tendency toward quietness, their curious and highly effective use of scholarly and at times pedantic diction, of the unusual but precise word as well as the ordinary and precise, are similar. Note the beautiful use of "incursion" played off against the equally beautiful "lets":

Steady incursion of the blade
Lets space into the crop:
Emptiness over all, save where
Cobweb on idle furrow
Stretches its gleam of idle hair.

It is not often that we get translations (or even "versions") as good in their own right as poems as these are. Tyutchev and Tomlinson have struck it lucky, and so have we.

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LOUIS SIMPSON

Matters of Tact[1]

As has been said before, Racine is nearly impossible to translate because he is perfect in his own language. The less style a man has, the easier it is to redo him. To put it another way, in certain writers subject and style may be separated; but Racine is his style. I would think that anyone who was curious about Racine would be able to read him in French. The next best thing would be to read Lowell's *Phaedra*. Lowell has done a good job of translation; if I am not wild about it, the reason is that, after all, it is a job, and I have been too well acquainted with *Phèdre* for too long a time to think that this is as good as *Phèdre*. But certainly, if Racine must be translated into English, this is as good a translation as we are likely to get.

What Lowell is up against, first of all, is the sound of the words. Racine's French is characteristically soft, feminine, serpentine—except where it rises in great tirades. English, on the other hand, strikes hard on the consonants, and Lowell's English is exceptionally rugged. So Racine, in Lowell's style, comes out a great deal harsher, more rugged, more rigid, than he really is. This is an interesting point—for in Wilbur's *Misanthrope,* Molière came out more polite and dandified than he is. Molière is more colloquial than Wilbur and not as witty. In translation we see the virtues and vices of our own poets magnified.

Another difficulty Lowell has had to contend with, is the rhymed couplet. Racine's habit is to pause at the end of a line, and to wind up the sentence in a couplet. Run-on's are comparatively rare. Now, if Lowell had tried to do this, he would have had to knot his lines like eels, twist the natural order of words, distort the meaning. On the other hand, if he had translated Racine into blank or free verse—well, anyone could have done that. . . . So he compromised, by writing in couplets but using run-on's lavishly and paraphrasing freely. Accustomed to the sound of Racine's couplets, my ear, to adopt a French way of describing things, found itself offended by Lowell's technique—but when I complained about it to a man of the theater, he said that, to the contrary, Lowell's run-on couplets are very pleasing. You hear the rhyme as an echo, a pleasant assonance—not falling with the regularity of a bell-clapper, as in the original. I sighed and withdrew my objection. To me, one of the sweetest sounds in the world is Racine's end-stopped couplets being inhaled by an audience of schoolgirls at the Comédie Française, and their punctual little gasps.

[1] RACINE: PHAEDRA. Translated by *Robert Lowell.* BEAUMARCHAIS: FIGARO'S MARRIAGE. Translated by *Jacques Barzun.* Farrar, Straus and Cudahy. $5.00. IMITATIONS, by *Robert Lowell.* Farrar, Straus and Cudahy. $4.50.

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Allowing Lowell his version of the couplet—and there seems no alternative—I have only two faults to find with the job he has done. The first is the exceptional ruggedness of tone I have already mentioned. Lowell is a bit like Aeschylus. He may be the best poet we have, but I wish he sounded more tranquil in his poetry and less like the warrior of Marathon. The other fault is an occasional mistake in idiom. For example, to translate Phèdre's description of Theseus:

Volage adorateur de mille objets divers

into this:

lascivious eulogist of any belle

is a gross lapse of diction. The word "belle" conjures up Gibson Girls, *The Belle of New York,* etc. In such cases, a neutral word would be better. Unlike most translators, who err on the side of neutrality, Lowell errs through his energy and concreteness, his need to find striking phrases. Sometimes, as in:

Your hesitation's killing me

colloquialism threatens to bring the rough edifice, the towering style, all tumbling down at once.

In general, Lowell is true to the original meaning, but on one occasion at least he gives us a version of Racine that is more Lowell than Racine. In Lowell, Phèdre's confession of her love for Hippolytus reads:

See, Prince! Look, this monster, ravenous
for her execution, will not flinch.
I want your sword's spasmodic final inch.

Now, that third line is not Racine—it is pure Lowell, and a distortion. Racine's Phèdre is not self-consciously making an up-to-date sexual metaphor; to her, a sword is a sword. "A primrose by the river's brim/ A simple primrose was to him." If Lowell frequently indulged himself in this way, his translation would be spurious. Fortunately, he does not.

It is easier to find fault with translation than to praise it. In general, this version of *Phèdre* is a work of the intelligence, vigor and imagination that we have a right to expect from Robert Lowell.

In the translations of French, German, Greek, Italian, and Russian poems which he calls *Imitations,* Lowell is best when he is translating passages that do not lend themselves to exaggeration or shock—that is, passages that do not offer opportunities for the excesses which are a defect of his own poetry. Thus, when he is confronted with Villon or Baudelaire, he turns them into spooks to frighten himself and the reader with, subtracting all that is euphonious, removing the beauty of which the grotesque is a counterpart. We have a skeletal Villon, a Leopold-Bloomish Baudelaire:

Like the poor lush who cannot satisfy,

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we try to force our sex with counterfeits,
die drooling on the deliquescent tits,
mouthing the rotten orange we suck dry.

In Baudelaire this is:

Ainsi, qu'un débauché pauvre qui baise et mange
Le sein martyrisé d'une antique catin,
Nous volons au passage un plaisir clandestin
Que nous pressons bien fort comme une vieille orange.

"Drooling on the deliquescent tits" is Lowell's invention, and it is not an improvement on "baise et mange/Le sein martyrisé." Baudelaire's detachment from a spectacle that is appalling enough in itself, his generalized view, freezes the scene like a moment in Hell. Lowell, on the other hand, fastens the eye on physical details of the action. Is it worth throwing away poetry in order to spook the bourgeois?

On the other hand, when he is translating Leopardi, whose poetic temperament seems far from his own, Lowell is not tempted to exaggerate; instead he imagines himself into the poem:

Once again the landscape is brown,
the sky drains to a pale blue,
shadows drop from mountain and thatch,
the young moon whitens,
as I catch
the clatter of small bells,
sounding in the holiday,

I can almost say
my heart takes comfort in the sound.
Children place their pickets
and sentinels,
and splash round and round
the village fountain.
They jump like crickets,
and make a happy sound.
The field-hand,
who lives on nothing,
marches home whistling,
and gloats on the day of idleness at hand.

Then all's at peace;
the lights are out;
I hear the rasp of shavings,
and the rapping hammer
of the carpenter, working all night
by lanternlight—

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hurrying and straining himself
to increase his savings
before the whitening day . . .

(Il sabato del villaggio)

Perhaps this strikes me as better only because I prefer what Leopardi is saying, because it is more useful than Baudelaire's masochism. Of course, in talking about translation, in talking about poetry at all, we are likely to fall into some psychological trap. But I do not think that my preference is irrelevant to criticism of Lowell's skill as a translator. Baudelaire, being so much in the vein of recent American poetry, with its confessional air, its obsequiousness before prose—Baudelaire encourages our faults. But to translate someone as far removed from ourselves as is Leopardi, requires an effort of imagination.

Two of the poems by Rimbaud are splendidly joyous; Lowell's handling of these shows his intelligence and sensitivity. The first is "At the Green Cabaret"; the other, "A Malicious Girl":

In the cigar-brown dining room, perfumed
by a smell of shellac and cabbage soup,
I held my plate and raked together some
God-awful Belgian dish. I blew my soup,

and listened to the clock tick while I ate,
and then the kitchen opened with a blast;
a housemaid entered, God knows why—her blouse
half open, yellow hair in strings. She touched

a little finger trembling to her cheek
where the peach-velvet changed from white to red,
and made a schoolgirl grimace with her lips . . .

She swept away the plates to clear my mind,
then—just like that—quite sure of being kissed,
she whispered, "Look, my cheek has caught a cold."

A curious collection. . . . There are translations of Homer, Sappho, Rilke, Heine, Montale, and others, besides the poets I've already mentioned. I suppose that *Imitations* will interest some people as a mirror of Lowell's mind. However, I don't think that the mind of a poet is of much interest in itself; it is what he creates that matters. Thus, while Lowell's lines from the *Iliad* seem unimportant, for they are unimportant as poetry, whatever reason he may have had for doing them, his translations of Rimbaud or Rilke, for example, are interesting in poetic terms—that is, in every line difficulties of sound and meaning are resolved. To check his "imitations" against the originals is to learn something about the tact of poetry.

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BERNARD KNOX

Between Scylla and Charybdis

THE TRANSLATION OF HOMER will always remain an insoluble problem; all great poets are untranslatable, but some more than others, and Homer more than any. This problem is lightly dismissed on the dust-cover of Fitzgerald's long-awaited translation of *The Odyssey;*[1] there we are reminded of "the ease, the eloquence, the limpid idiom of the ancient Greek" and told that "in this translation there are no false archaisms or incongruities to come between the reader and Homer." The blurb (one may as well call a blurb a blurb) goes on to claim that now no one needs to learn ancient Greek to appreciate Homer. I am not of course blaming Fitzgerald for this rubbish (which of us has not suffered from the enthusiastic ignorance of copywriters?) but quote it because it raises (by its blithe dismissal) the real difficulties the translator of Homer has to face.

"Limpid idiom." "No false archaisms or incongruities." But for the Greeks of the great age, that fifth century that we inevitably think of when we say "the Greeks," the idiom of Homer was far from limpid (they had to learn the meaning of long lists of obscure words at school) and it was brimful of (not false but real) archaisms—of vocabulary, syntax and grammar—and of incongruities—words and forms drawn from different dialects and different stages of the growth of the language. In fact by the fifth century, the time Greece became conscious of itself as a separate and superior civilization, the language of Homer was one nobody would dream of using except an oracular priest or a literary parodist.

This does not of course mean that Homer was a poet known only to scholars and schoolboys; on the contrary the Homeric epics were familiar as household words in the mouths of ordinary men. They maintained their hold on the tongues and imaginations of the Greeks by their superb literary quality—the simplicity, speed and directness of the narrative technique, the brilliance and excitement of the action, the greatness and imposing humanity of the characters—and by the fact that they presented the Greek people in memorable form (essential for a civilization which even in the fifth century was still basically oral rather than literary) with the sacred texts of their official religious beliefs and the ethical, political and practical wisdom of their cultural tradition. Homer was thus at once contemporary in content and antique in form; the texture of Homeric epic was for the classic age of Greece like that of the Elgin marbles for us—weathered by time but speaking to us directly, august, authoritative, inimitable, a vision

[1] **THE ODYSSEY, translated by *Robert Fitzgerald*. With drawings by *Hans Erni*. Doubleday. $4.95.**

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of life fixed forever in forms that seem to have been moulded by gods rather than men.

This double nature of Homeric language cannot of course be translated into any other. The attempt of the nineteenth century translators, Lang, Leaf, Myers and Butcher, to convey something of its effect by using the language of the King James Bible was hailed as successful by Victorian taste but was soon revealed as a failure. The translators of the Bible could use Jacobean English (with a very large mixture of archaisms from earlier versions) to magnificent effect, but a nineteenth century attempt to use the same idiom could only substitute quaintness for power. Later translators saw that the only solution for Homeric translation was to cut their losses and try to produce a version based on contemporary English. Samuel Butler's prose version of the *Odyssey* was the first serious attempt along these lines—a pioneering effort which however has not stood the test of time too well: the prose is still tinged with archaism and manages to be rather dull (an extraordinary result for Butler). T. E. Lawrence produced a more modern English version, also in prose, but he despised the poem ("Wardour street" he called the style) and true to his contempt sacrificed dignity for a flashy journalistic facility. Rieu's prose version, the most widely read so far, had the great virtue of using simple contemporary English and using it well; he saw the *Odyssey* as a novel and translated it as one—with undoubted success in this limited objective.

"Modern English." It is not so much an answer to the problem as a problem in itself, for modern English commands an incredibly wide range of diction. That the modern translator must avoid archaism is beyond dispute but even with that proviso the language faces him with pitfalls at every step. A story of gods and heroes demands a certain dignity in the telling, but the need to preserve dignity may quench liveliness; the pursuit of liveliness, on the other hand, may lead to incongruity in the form of slang, over-colloquial expression or mere vulgarity. Fitzgerald has on the whole faced these problems with the sure taste and the skill of a practising poet. The English he writes is remarkable for its high concentration of native English words as opposed to eighteenth century Latin derivatives; a random comparison with Rieu makes clear the toughness of Fitzgerald's language, its *robur*. "I cannot resent your indignation at what happened. . . . But it is impossible for me always to take the sensible line. I am prevented by these mischief-makers who surround me here, and there's no one to support me." (Rieu). "I cannot take it ill that you are angry. / How can I always keep to what is fair / while these sit here to put fear in me? Princes / from near and far whose interest is my ruin. / Are any on my side?" (Fitzgerald). This preference of the concrete and short word to the abstract and long is one of the sources of Fitzgerald's great strength; the language has a simplicity which is itself a kind, and not the least kind, of dignity.

Rieu presented the *Odyssey* as a novel, and so justified the use of

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prose. But it is not a novel, it is a poem. The force of Homer's narrative depends to a large degree on the supple, various, enchanting rhythms of the hexameter verse. Recently this problem too has been faced, for the *Iliad,* by Richmond Lattimore, whose translation, using contemporary English and a rhythmic approximation of Homer's own line, has established itself as the classic translation for our age and I suspect for a long time to come. And now Fitzgerald has undertaken the same exacting and difficult task for the *Odyssey.* There can be no doubt that he too has succeeded; his version is, whatever its shortcomings, a poem, and a fine one.

He has tackled the metrical problem along different lines. Where Lattimore aims to imitate the regularity of the hexameter (with the great advantage that he is able to preserve most of Homer's significant *enjambements*), Fitzgerald has taken his cue from the variety of the Greek meter, and allowed himself great liberty in his line-length. He works basically with the standard English blank verse line, using all the subtle resolutions and modulations introduced by the poets of the last fifty years and also varying its length as his ear directs. His line ranges from five to thirteen syllables, and at one point (the battle in the hall) he uses a very long line reminiscent of the old Elizabethan fourteener. This variety is one of the charms of his version; without it (as in so many Tennysonian translations) the verse would have tended to become in Byron's phrase: "so very blank"; as it is there is only one line in the entire translation which deserves Byron's criticism ("How very very improbable it seems"—p. 413) and even that may be Fitzgerald's ironic demonstration that he could do it, once, if he wanted to.

Fitzgerald has made the best possible use of the variety he elected (as on his part Lattimore did of the regularity) but it was again (as in the matter of diction) a choice between two things both of which are to be found in Homer. The Homeric hexameter never becomes monotonous and it is always metrically regular. And this regularity imposed on variety is Homer's great metrical secret, the strongest weapon in his poetic arsenal. That long line, which no matter how it varies in the opening and the middle always ends in the same way, builds up its hypnotic effect in book after book, imposing on things and men and gods the same pattern, presenting in a rhythmic microcosm the wandering course to a fixed end which is the pattern of the wrath of Achilles and the wanderings of Odysseus, of all natural phenomena and all human destinies. Butcher's famous tag "the surge and thunder of the *Odyssey*" missed the point (one could as well say "the surge and thunder of the *Iliad*" for both poems are composed in the same meter), but it is none the less true that Fitzgerald's fluid line, musical and skilful as it is, gives little idea of the essence of the Homeric verse form.

Fitzgerald is of course a fine poet and this translation is clearly a

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poet's work. Readers will find what they have missed in the prose versions, a heightened discourse and an exactness of diction fitting itself to the varied moods of the narrative. He has distilled out of his own poetic experience and experiment a narrative verse style which in its variety, its dramatic quality and wit gives the reader a worthy substitute for the melody, subtlety and nobility of the Homeric original. He has used all of the resources of the poet's art, not scorning minor archaisms (in spite of the blurb) when they can be used to effect, nor is he afraid of inversion nor of unusual words. At times his verse achieves passages of great beauty, and its normal level is one of satisfying precision and unfailing charm. He is especially successful in dramatic passages—the debate in Book II or the Ares-Aphrodite incident, where he has found brilliant expedients to render the mixture of nobility and broad humor to be found in the original. There are of course bones to pick: Cyclops' "Nohbdy" seems unnecessarily burlesque, "by all the powers" in the mouth of a Phaeacian sailor reminds one irresistibly of Long John Silver (perhaps it was meant to but it doesn't help) and when Achilles in the underworld says to Odysseus "Old knife, what next?" one seems to hear faint echoes of a Kurt Weill accompaniment. But these are minor quibbles (the pleased critic's privilege); over the whole length of the translation Fitzgerald's work as a poet calls for the highest praise.

It is therefore all the more unfortunate that in some places he has followed his Muse down paths that lead him very far from Homer. Hermes to Calypso, for example (p. 96), speaks in an exquisite parody of Pope, "He notes your friend, most ill-starred by renown / of all the peers who fought for Priam's town . . ." which contains the standard occasional triplet and ends in the regulation Alexandrine. It is beautifully done and marvellously witty, but there is no excuse for it. It corresponds to nothing in Homer, and more than that, it breaks completely for a while the spell of the narrative style Fitzgerald has almost coaxed us into believing is like that of Homer. The same must be said (and with less admiration for the verse, though some critics have praised it) of the two occasions (Hermes to Odysseus on Circe's island and the Sirens' song) where Fitzgerald has substituted extremely free lyric verse of his own for the original hexameters. They look and sound oddly in the poem and have the same destructive effect on the illusion he has produced that we are reading something like Homer. It is a mark of the greatness of Homer that the power of the Sirens' incantation is created for us in the same language and meter as the rest of the poem. In these three instances Fitzgerald has committed the sin which Rieu defined as interposing one's own personality between the reader and Homer.

But the translation is a great achievement. The longfelt need for a poetic translation of the *Odyssey* has been filled and it is safe to say that this will be the standard English version for a long time to come.

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BENJAMIN DE MOTT

Fiction Chronicle

HOW'RE THINGS IN THE TRADE? Swell, swell. Sales up, market hard, high martini counts at midday, Random House on the Big Board. Mass mags hustling as never before on the facts-about-fiction beat (*Time* put a former police reporter on Salinger's scent, learned that the writer's sister is a "twice-divorced dress buyer at Bloomingdale's"). Newspapers still holding candles aloft at the passing of the great (the *Times'* headline reported SWEDEN STUNNED when Hemingway died, and the Cleveland *Plain Dealer's* financial editor produced five hundred words about the Champ's philosophy of investment: " 'Playing the market is like wooing a fickle woman. You need time, study and guts for it. I buy blue chips instead, and put them away,' [said] Ernest Hemingway [describing] his philosophy on investing to this reporter in his Cuban home some years ago"). And as for the book editors of the dailies—they are actually intensifying the drive to elevate literary standards. Working together they banned Harold Robbins' *The Carpetbaggers* (a best-selling do-it-yourself book about fornication) from the best-seller charts, and are continuing to stand firm even in the face of a threat of boosts in advertising revenue:

> Author [Robbins] flew to Chicago last week [said a recent *Variety* column on the "literati"] in an unsuccessful huddle with Don W. Maxwell, Chi Trib exec editor, over that best-seller chart ban. Lacking that, Robbins said his publisher, Simon & Schuster, would launch a big blast publicity campaign—ostensibly to shame the Trib, but practically to capitalize on the 'banned-in-Boston' motif. Could also be some sort of legal action will result, but just what wasn't clear, and the author wasn't talking on this point.

Nor does the good news end at this dispatch. You have only to glance at the preface of Jack Hoffenberg's *Sow Not in Anger,* the longest first novel of the current season (632 pp.), to find evidence that the situation of writers themselves has altered for the better. Billed as a "southern family dynasty" tale, the book *is* a turkey—let that in fairness be said. Chapters begin "Death came to Jonas Taylor in Atlanta . . ."; cliché density is above average:

> Meanwhile a puzzled Wayne chafed resentfully at Coralee's cavalier treatment, and resented the sly hints and remarks she dropped for his benefit. In defense, he began chasing about after dark with Hobey Kittering and Lush Corbett, but after a few fumbling experiences with willing female accomplices, he became remorseful and repentant and dropped the substitutes.

And the necking throughout is troublingly complicated:

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> He returned her kiss with a fierce possessiveness, feeling her mouth under his, one hand at the base of her neck, pressing her head forward.

But what matters, from the good-news point of view, is that this first novelist seems at no moment to have suffered exposure to a world in which "people don't care any more about art." After acknowledging help from his literary agent and editor in a foreword, Jack Hoffenberg goes on (in the fashion of Sugar Ray in his prime) to thank a whole clutch of retainers—including "my attorney and business manager, Herbert B. Schlosberg of Hollywood." That a first novelist of this order of merit can afford a staff is proof that fiction still dwells in its first fresh morning of life.

When this is said, though, it needs to be added that not all the items produced in the past season are dawn-lit. Publishers grin (and merge), first novelists hire teams, but up the road from both groups stand some figures whose pep pills (at least at this moment) are doing a worrisomely inferior job. Pessimism alone enjoys making much of such circumstances, especially when all outward signs spell health. But since a number of these signs have already been read, and since (as it happens) a number of established reputations, as well as one or two writers of large initial promise, are currently in the camp of the ailing, best here to turn away from sunshine (in the name of critical balance) to some shadows of former novelistic selves.[1]

The former self of James Kennaway, late of the Cameron Highlanders, is memorialized in the author's first novel, *Tunes of Glory,* a story about garrison life and varieties of military arrogance. The book wasn't widely reviewed in America (were it not for Alec Guinness the very title would now be obscure), and, because of an unresolved conflict of irony and sentiment in its pages, it couldn't be described as a perfect work of literary art. But the book was fresh—partly because the author seemed unaware that the "homosexual revolution of modern times" was a grand thing. His tale wasn't, to be sure, particularly aggressive in its manliness; it simply was governed by an unfamiliar assumption—namely (*pace Harper's Bazaar*), that men are usually men and women are usually women.[2] And even if it had been aggressive, the fact would remain that masculinity in itself rarely makes good reading. But there

[1] SOW NOT IN ANGER, by *Jack Hoffenberg.* Dutton. $5.95. HOUSEHOLD GHOSTS, by *James Kennaway.* Atheneum. $4.00. THE GREATER INFORTUNE, by *Rayner Heppenstall.* New Directions. $3.75. THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT, by *John Steinbeck.* Viking. $4.50. AMERICAN EXPRESS, by *Gregory Corso.* Olympia Press. NF 15. CLOCK WITHOUT HANDS, by *Carson McCullers.* Houghton Mifflin. $4.00. FRANNY AND ZOOEY, by *J. D. Salinger.* Little, Brown. $4.00. THE DEMONS, by *Heimito von Doderer.* Knopf. Two vols. $13.50. HOLY WEEK, by *Louis Aragon.* Putnam. $5.75. A NEW LIFE, by *Bernard Malamud.* Farrar, Straus and Cudahy. $4.95.

[2] For evidence that this would not necessarily be the key assumption of fiction set in a garrison world, see Simon Raven, *The Feathers of Death* (1960).

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was a shade more to *Tunes of Glory* than mere comfortable responsiveness to "life-values." The writer showed a nimbleness comparable to that of any young British writer, and in addition he possessed—Scotland, a place just a bit off the map where (with luck) the imagination might manage to thrive.

Its failure to thrive, as evidenced by Kennaway's new book, asks to be explained as a consequence of this Highlander's refusal to stick to his gun. According to the note on the jacket of *Household Ghosts,* the author, who is now about thirty-five, came to London in his late twenties (after quitting the regiment), worked as an editor for some years, and has since written film scripts and plays. Experience of London is doubtless useful in its way—but it issues here in a novel that wouldn't have been less like *Tunes of Glory* if Rumer Godden had written it. The setting (the lowlands of Scotland) has not changed, but now the place is a maremma populated by impotent husbands, funny tender drunken nance-ish brothers, brittle girls who are looking for something they seem to have lost in bed, and similar apparatus of last week's, this week's and every other week's little batch of little English novels. The disappearance of ruddy flesh and strong voices and canny warriors doesn't in itself signify that this truant officer has yet become a paid-in member of the London litry gang. (For an idea of what a man has to know to qualify, cast an eye over Raynor Heppenstall's *The Greater Infortune,* which tells about the prewar London life of an outsider named Leckie—a life packed with changelings, lectures at the Institute of Mystical Science, acrobats named Clifford and exchanges like the following:

"Colin, how can you be so horrid?"
Colin tossed back his hair and said:
"I don't care. I don't. It brings out the beast in me, Tristram.")

But it does signify that Kennaway is more impressionable than a person of his gifts ought to be. The best that can be hoped for him is that, once he is fully initiated, he will discover that the true strangeness of life for fiction is no longer to be found among Colins and Tristrams, but instead in those *echt* beasts—fierce-whirling, whiskey-maddened Camerons, for example—who have to stay north (or at least out of town) to survive.

Is the relation between the Scottish lowlands and London similar to the relation between the parched Southwest and Mystic, Conn. (which might be the setting of John Steinbeck's new book)? Probably not, and in any event it would be senseless to compare the situation of young James Kennaway to that of the famous man who (twenty-two years ago) wrote *The Grapes of Wrath.* You cannot ask anybody to go back to the Dust Bowl when they've turned the place into a roller skating rink where Greta Garbo does The Twist. Neither can you pretend that Steinbeck in his late years has been persuaded to accept the values of English fancy dons. Ethan Allen Hawley, the hero of *The Winter*

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of Our Discontent, is a son of New England whaling captains whose rugged honesty has reduced him to a job as a grocery store clerk. He believes in the old virtues, abhors the cash nexus, and (in a too obviously lovable way) refuses to be a Nice Pop. When his children announce their intention to enter a Hearst "National I Love America Contest" ("It's the grapes," one of them explains. "How about going to Washington, hotel, shows, meet the President, the works. How's that for the grapes?"), Ethan asks whether they love America or prizes, tells them to worry about their schoolwork, and insists that "I just [want] to separate the cereal from the mouse mask. They get all mixed up."

But there is of course some difference between human decency and fictional authority. Once or twice in his career Steinbeck labored hard at writing, accepted the killing obligation to offer objects instead of comment on objects, places and people instead of complaints. But he has not done this for years, and he does not do it in the novel at hand. His scene is completely unrealized (he explains in a note that "this book is about a large part of America today"). His talk, though bouncy and cheerful, is embarrassingly out of touch (consider the slangy "grapes" above). And his central situation, integrity challenged in a grocery store, never becomes a situation (because it interests its creator merely as an excuse for chatter about how to be really good). Nobody can blame an established reputation for being reluctant to roll the fictional stone any longer up the hill, or for ceasing to regard self-doubt as a powerful primal energy, or for hoping that his name will serve in lieu of illusion. But there is no way of evading the truth that the hope is false, and that the writer who gives himself over to it has the poorest (not the best) chance of getting himself accepted as a sage.

The energy just mentioned, a counter-force created by anxiety that you the reader may not see exactly what (and as) I the writer see, hasn't often appeared in the New Wilderness writers. Theirs is the energy of the hitchhiker not of the fictionist, and the success of the school owes much to the belief that it is harder to get a ride out of Denver than to get a character believably into a phone booth. (The latest offering of this school, as may be remarked in passing, is Gregory Corso's *American Express,* a work having to do with a boat and a group of people named Wolfherald, Thimble and Hinderov; the Olympia Press advertises the book in Parisian English as "disconcerting and unreal," words that here at home mean: nutty and dull.) But Carson McCullers is no Wilderness lady—which is to say that her work has hitherto not left the impression that it was slapped up hastily on the road. *Clock Without Hands* does leave this impression. It tells two stories—one about a dying pharmacist, the other about a fading Senator Claghorn—but both have little substance. And indeed, except for a few pages of conversation between precocious Southern teenagers (an earnest white and a sybaritic Negro whose apartment is furnished with twin beds covered with rose-colored spreads of "pure rayon silk"), the book as a whole is

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depressingly underdone. Time after time Miss McCullers ventures on a paragraph that calls for sensations and immediacy—only to drop the enterprise in mid-course. Consider the following snippet on flight:

> It was an open Moth Jester was flying and the wind pulled his red hair backward from his scalp. He deliberately had not worn a helmet because he liked the sensation of wind and sun. He would put on the helmet when he went to the house and met Sherman there. Careless he would be, and busy, a helmeted aviator. After a half an hour of wind-rushing cobalt and sun, he began to think of landing. Zooming carefully, circling to get just the proper distance, he had no room in his thoughts for Sherman even, because he was responsible for his own life and for the training Moth. The landing was bumpy, but when he put on his helmet and jumped out with careful grace he wished somebody could have seen him.

The writer isn't producing in this paragraph; there is nothing in her sentences—no plane, no aviator, no up and no down. She seems to say, I am Carson McCullers and I am telling you about an airplane ride, and I give you my word that there *was* an airplane ride: what more can you ask?

According to report, the author of *Clock Without Hands* worked simultaneously to produce a novel and a play, and certain oddities about the pace of the book suggest that at one moment the novelist was functioning as a novelist, and at the next as a contriver of scenes detachable as units. Conceivably the lack of sensations in the paragraph just quoted might be explained as a consequence of the writer's having remarked to herself that you can't solve the problem of a second act curtain by achieving (in language) the sense of ascent and descent. But whatever the explanation, the novel-reader does ask for something more than a personal voucher—even from writers who have won their stars at the age of twenty-two. He asks unremittingly (in the worn but still indispensable phrase) for solidities of specification, and when a writer who once yielded them ungrudgingly turns miserly, he has no choice except to speak of decline.

Of if not of decline—to carry the observation forward to the work of J. D. Salinger—then of the possibility that the writer will shortly cease to be the kind who successfully offers something to everybody. For years Salinger has been that kind of writer. He has always been open, of course, to the charge of being soft-centered. To youth and laziness he promises a release into the utopia where every difficulty and agony is understood to be a result of the barbaric insensitivity of Others; at the heart of his myth lies the conviction that no one of merit ought to *work,* that all truly decent folk spring full-brained from the womb and therefore need only to master a few great texts of anti-knowledge—weapons with which to belabor knaves and scholars. Putting it another way: the world of most Salinger stories connects (in its assumptions) not with the general world but with those odd com-

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munities that grow up around conservatories and museum schools—societies in which youngsters who haven't read a word of Shakespeare or Spinoza argue violently about Wilhelm Reich or Edmund Bergler, M.D., pleasingly pleased with themselves.

But although the results of such pleasures—inertia, ignorance and self-pity—are less than admirable, Salinger in representing them often produced bonus stories-within-stories. For while he thought like a child, he saw like a sage: he loved objects, delighted in creating sensations, filled his pages with crisp, ice-bright fact that age could treasure even as it took its usual stern line about bleedinghearts. As a number of reviewers pointed out, the stories called "Franny" and "Zooey" are by no means bare chambers: there is a superbly done living room, a delicious bathroom cabinet, a splendid tubbing, a fair Cronin's. But in these stories the writer is beginning to feel irritatingly confident about matters he knows little about (someone ought to climb over that fence at Cornish, N. H., and explain to the recluse what a "section man" is) and, as is well-known, in "Seymour" (not included in this volume) he nearly gives *things* up altogether. To be sure, the end of this progression toward objectlessness won't of course be a complete loss of audience—Salinger's gift to youth (an easy justification of self-importance and of contempt for others) is likely to remain for decades as valuable as an old MG or a good summer job at the club. And those who profess to see in the progression proof that this writer never did have much to offer the generality are a bit too solemn: at his best the creator of the Glass Gang is one of the few American writers since vintage Faulkner who actually is fun to read, who offers comic delights and manages to think up people who aren't disgusting. (When Mrs. Glass, eyeing the TV script in the bathroom, remarks assessingly that "The Heart is an Autumn Wanderer" is an "Unusual title," Salinger becomes part of a tradition that connects at no point either with jacks or zen.) It isn't, in short, solemnity that regrets his opting for hysterics: it is the grown-up longing for wit and genuine news of the world. Those who feel this longing were perfectly willing to settle for a bone tossed out now and then over the heads of sentimental kiddies. Salinger's decision to deprive them of it, to spend himself wholly on a passel of gloomy youth, is wrongheaded and selfish. If (as rumor claims) there are grown men strengthening him in it, they deserve a good, non-permissive type shake.

Is a change of tone appropriate for the moment of confrontation with the major imports of the season—items from France and Austria that weigh in at about two thousand pages? The notion that it is virtuous to read a long book transformed itself ages ago into the notion that every long book matters greatly, and doubts of the validity of both notions have been smothered by the reluctance of all but the happiest (or most feckless) reader to admit, after giving half a week to some enormous volume, that he has in fact been wasting his time. It should be said at once that fancy can conceive a reader for whom

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Heimito von Doderer's *The Demons* will not be a waste of time. This imaginary person has lived for a year or two in Vienna; he has more than an ordinary curiosity about the life of urban upper (and upper middle) class Austrians—civil servants, bankers, lawyers, grandes dames, editors, intellectuals, professors and the like; he knows precisely how to move from details and events in the lives of such people—ping pong parties, bank failures, the burning of the Palace of Justice—to truths of social decay in the pre-Hitler years; he has antiquarian interests that will sustain him as he reads a long tale of witchbaiting drawn from a medieval manuscript (here translated into ye olde English); he is immensely capable at disentangling foreign names; his eagerness to read lectures on the subject of modern historiography is matched by his scorn for economy, plain narrative lines, and original characterization; and he is strong enough not only to "take in" but really to appreciate—after 1200 pages—observations as sensible as the following:

> Every really decent man . . . carries a kind of jewel within the housing of his personality; those are the rubies by which the watchworks of practical life run; and life would come to a standstill if these indispensable gems were to drop out.

The world is various, which means that (somewhere outside a reviewer's imagination) such a man exists—and he will not find *The Demons* dull. Add to his talents and disposition a feeling for French history (1815: Napoleon coming on from Elba, Louis XVIII on the run), some enthusiasm for Géricault, and patience with a narrator who likes to interrupt an almost invisible story of 1815 with thudding remarks about 1940, and you have a figure who will also enjoy Louis Aragon's *Holy Week*. For most readers, however, both books will serve only as evidence that, although the current *ancienne vague* European novel is brainier, heavier, and more ambitious than any other sort of fiction now being produced, it is in no sense more exhilarating, and cannot be described as an item perilous to avoid.

To contend that it would be perilous to miss Bernard Malamud's *A New Life* is to run the risk of not being believed—partly because it is already well-known that in this book the writer wanders from his special beat (to an English Department in the Pacific Northwest), partly because Malamud is the sort of artist whose gifts seem to require that he stay on his special beat. It is one thing, after all, to claim that the great trick of the author of *The Magic Barrel* is that of transforming the homely into the strange, and another to maintain that the constituency of a state aggie college is as tractable a piece of matter for transformation as a rabbinical student in Central Park. The fantastic and the urban are one: it is a potentiality of Macy's street floor that a shoe salesman who works there should turn into Father Zossima, just as it is a potentiality of the subway that dragons and choirs of angels will hide out in the men's at the Brooklyn Bridge stop. Malamud discovered these potentialities, but he didn't create them, and it follows

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that it is not simply the quality of his metaphor that leads readers to believe him when (in the city) he soars off into the silvery air of myth.

As is obvious, all this is a way of observing that the first reviewers of *A New Life* who went straight to work on the allegory, identifying the first year English instructor at Cascadia, S. Levin, as a schlemiel saint on a pilgrimage, were more adept at flight than most readers will be. For to repeat, rising above the bland workaday world of the tank-town college isn't as easy as sailing over the five boroughs; the particulars of this world, which include hardly any elves and fairies, are like bricks on wings—murderers of poetry, meaning and myth. Granted that there could be, in the Pacific Northwest, a literary scholar-horseman, a professor named Bucket with five children and a wife named Algene and a habit of talking like Sterne's Trim, a fastidious Syrian graduate student named Sadek A. Meheen, a sexy undergraduate (named Nadalee) with her own cabin in the pines, a clutch of teachers named Ferris Farper, Merdith Schultz, Leopold Kuck: would there not also be hungry generations to trod the poet down, mash him up in deadly fact? The question insinuates itself in a manner that qualifies belief in the Big Picture of the emergent saint: S. Levin's fantasy love affair with the Chairman's wife, his near victories for the cause of literature and imagination—these strike the reader as turns that fit the allegory neatly, but at the expense of implicit facts.

Yet in the end this does not matter, for if the allegory trembles, the humor shouts. S. Levin is Virtue—but Virtue lectures on "Education [as] revelation" with its fly open. S. Levin is Innocence—but after making love in a hayloft with a waitress named Laverne, Innocence gazes down and reflects: "In front of cows . . . Now I belong to the ages." Nothing is less satisfactory than an assurance that the quality of some novelistic performance is in fact dependent upon the peculiarities of the writer's voice—but in Malamud's case it is not easy to go beyond that assurance. The stuff of *A New Life* is only a tenth as pliant as the black unknown metropolis, but the book establishes that even the most commonplace stuff can be talked into meaning—if the voice that speaks is complicated enough, if it can sound (all at once) passionate and objective, idealistic and cynical, hopeless and hopeful, exalted and ruined. Talked into what meaning? Well, *A New Life* affirms, surely, that any swamp can be transformed into an arena by aspiration. And it proves—this is why it might well be a mistake to miss it—that humor and aspiration need not cancel each other out in a cage of neutral irony. The teacher of these lessons doesn't redeem the whole bookish season or heal all the ailing; he can't be packaged as the gift offer novelist of the century. But to that rest camp occupied by victims of the big-blast campaign for *The Carpetbaggers,* the place where bagpipers play darts with golden-haired queers while Clevelanders peruse the Hemingway market letter, he does offer a rare nugget of really good news: namely that there still is almost nothing that is *absolutely* impossible for art.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

Five Characters in Search of an Author

OSCAR LEWIS IS AN ANTHROPOLOGIST who has devoted himself, for two decades, to studying the rural and urban poor of Mexico. In 1959 he published *Five Families* (subtitled "Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty"), in which he superimposed the techniques of fiction upon the techniques of the social scientist: the book presents five Mexican families by reporting, from the lives of each of them, a complete actual day, its conversation stenographically recorded, its events narrated by an author who reserves and exercises the right to "some selection of data," who freely uses description and flashback "to give more depth and meaning" to what he retains, and whose point of view allows him, he would have us believe, unimpeded access to the minds of his characters. Mr. Lewis called his method "ethnographic realism" ("in contrast to literary realism"). To anthropologists (Oliver La Farge, for instance, who wrote the Foreword), the method, abandoning as it does the statistical paraphernalia of the scholarly monograph, may well have looked revolutionary; to a layman and a literary critic, *Five Families* reads like mildly interesting, rather old-fashioned naturalistic fiction written by a novelist who has a good many unassorted facts, a pedestrian style, and an unwarranted confidence in his capacity to imagine or to penetrate minds categorically different from, though not necessarily simpler than, his own.

Now, in *The Children of Sánchez*,[1] Mr. Lewis has concocted a sort of fictitious, non-fictional stream-of-consciousness for his somewhat fictionalized characters, presenting the members of a single family (one of the five in the previous book) through their tape-recorded ruminations and recollections, which he has "selected, arranged, and organized" (in unspecified ways) "into coherent life stories," but which he keeps clear of the mediocre omniscient voice of *Five Families*. This voice does, however, speak in the Introduction, and the hash of social-scientistic and quasi-literary jargon it affects helps to expose some of the drawbacks in Mr. Lewis's newest and most boldly unmonographic method:

> This approach gives us a cumulative, multifaceted, panoramic view of each individual, of the family as a whole, and of many aspects of lower-class Mexican life. The independent versions of the same incidents given by the various family members provide a built-in check upon the reliability and validity of much of the data and thereby partially offset the subjectivity inherent in a single autobiography.

[1] THE CHILDREN OF SÁNCHEZ, by *Oscar Lewis*. Random House. $7.50.

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At the same time it reveals the discrepancies in the way events are recalled by each member of the family.

This method of multiple autobiographies also tends to reduce the element of investigator bias because the accounts are not put through the sieve of a middle-class North American mind but are given in the words of the subjects themselves. In this way, I believe, I have avoided the two most common hazards in the study of the poor, namely, oversentimentalization and brutalization. . . .

The tape recorder . . . has made possible the beginning of a new kind of literature of social realism. With the aid of the tape recorder, unskilled, uneducated, and even illiterate persons can talk about themselves and relate their observations and experiences in an uninhibited, spontaneous, and natural manner. The stories of Manuel, Roberto, Consuelo, and Marta have a simplicity, sincerity, and directness which is characteristic of the spoken word, of oral literature in contrast to written literature. Despite their lack of formal training, these young people express themselves remarkably well, particularly Consuelo, who sometimes reaches poetic heights.

To catalogue and describe the inaccuracy and wooly-mindedness of the assumptions behind these unruffled sentences would itself require a scholarly monograph. A reviewer can begin by isolating the long-lived romantic assumption, which seems to have been appropriated as Article One by the modern breed of other-directed, people-liking social scientist, that everyone's experience is equivalent to the words in which he describes it; that a "spontaneous" autobiographical statement (solicited, it is true, over many days by many questions, and painstakingly edited afterward) is "life," not "art," functions in a special, extra-literary medium, and is necessarily both authentic and uniquely expressive. But of course everyone finds his words where he can. Under continuous assault by the contemporary popular literary genres—comic books, true-romance magazines, advertising, movies, radio, TV—besides such national and class sentimentalities as the cult of *machismo* (manliness) and the rote formulas of a residual piety, Mr. Lewis' five characters (Sánchez himself, as well as his four children) have as much trouble as the rest of us in finding, or inventing, a vocabulary by which they can reveal not just the general, mass-cultural preconceptions of their class and country but deeply themselves. Language, for them too, is an aesthetic medium, which can be used well or badly. It may be that in a genuinely primitive society, secure in its traditions and unsubjected to bogus art, language is a less difficult (as well as less random and less multitudinous) medium than it is for us. The Mexican urban poor, however, are not noble savages who react with pure intensity to the sun and the moon, life and death; they are like the rest of us, reacting in terms or in despite of all the bad art which is, like the ceaseless insidious Muzak in restaurants and supermarkets, the very sound of

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our lives. When Roberto says, "Life is a comedy and the world is a theatre and we are all actors," he could be quoting from a soap-opera variant on Italian *verismo;* when Manuel says, "Life around here is raw, it is more real, than among people with money," he is reciting one of the consolations of poverty invented by some second-rate nineteenth-century middle-class novelist; when Consuelo, the one who rises to "poetic heights," watches her father, "his short form, unmoving, standing in the kitchen, as though rooted to the cement floor . . . and the red tip of the cigarette burned in the dark," she is parroting the words of a debased literary manner traceable to Conrad and by now the atmospheric staple of every TV melodrama.

Mr. Lewis is moved, and wishes us to be equally moved, by an awareness of "their potentialities and wasted talents." What chiefly comes across in these accounts, however, is not a sense of potentialities and talents (no mute inglorious Miltons) but a quantity of more or less enlightening bits of information about the life of the poor (normally a half-dozen, and at times as many as twenty, persons of both sexes and all ages sleep in a single room eight feet square; delousing a child's hair before combing it is routine procedure; the rarest feeling is affection; there is much prejudice against persons with dark complexions; as the poor know them, the Mexican police are lawless, venal, and pathologically brutal), which accumulate into an impression of the terrible anarchic tedium of their days, punctuated only by animal sex or by outbursts of homicidal violence. Actually, Mr. Lewis' favorite, Consuelo, is the least engaging of the group because she is the artiest and most self-indulgent in her language; she rather resembles her endlessly self-vindicating brother Manuel. Roberto and Marta, whose talk (at least in translation) most nearly approximates a sort of alley-cat lingo, manifest an occasional bleak vitality; and Roberto's adventures as a runaway, a convict, and a street tough are the only consistently interesting episodes in the book. Finally and most impressively, the father emerges as the irreducible central fact of the consciousness of each of his children; and if his position seems in part inherited from his rural, patriarchal, Indian past, it is obviously in larger part determined by the tireless, stoical tenacity with which he provides food and shelter for them and their families, comes to them in their times of trouble, manages somehow to get them money in their times of need, stands always for them as the tower of strength without which they would find it impossible to imagine any stability at all.

Yet what is Mr. Lewis getting at? His conviction that he has produced "a new kind of literature of social realism" is naive and unfounded. His assumption that "sincerity" is all—as if the truth of personality were measurable by polygraph—will not survive scrutiny: these people, confronted by the tape recorder and the guileless face of the North American professor, will give him as much of themselves as they can bear in the terms in which they can bear to contemplate it; and they

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will falsify and rationalize as crudely and unknowingly as the rest of us. How can we judge whether they are telling the truth about even the least self-incriminating data of family experience—a quarrel, a minor failure of responsibility, an untactful word, an irritable lapse of decorum? Mr. Lewis mentions the "built-in check" of his multiple autobiographies—as if five different kinds of lies about the same event will necessarily add up to the truth of it. This *Rashomon* device, if it is ever justified at all, is justified only as a deliberate effort to suggest the protean quality of experience, the wax on which each personality imposes the shape of its momentary need; and Mr. Lewis is quite innocent of such an intention. No, he thinks that what he is presenting is truth. It never occurs to him that if we ever know what to think of characters in a book, it is because they are created by an author without whose judgment and direction we should be left to flounder in guesses, enigmas, and boredom; there would not even be raw fact; for there is no such thing as raw fact about human experience.

How, notwithstanding, does Jesús Sánchez persuade us of his existence and his strength? Not, indeed, by what he himself says of himself, but by what his children say of him; because then, talking of him, they achieve the eloquence and authority of art, because only then do their mean cautions, their self-pity, their mawkish or casual appropriation of others for their own purposes, their attentive playing up to the scientific prying of the good-natured professor—only then do these screens fall away and leave them with the awed awareness of somebody not themselves, a separate, strange, unmanageable, providential person:

> My father didn't speak to me for a month, and treated me badly. I felt terrible and was ashamed to look him in the face. I had been his favorite and I couldn't take my punishment. I was so upset that one night I began to cry very hard. I couldn't stop crying, until my *papá* spoke to me. I asked him to forgive me and he said, "Don't be a fool. I am your father and will never abandon you." After that I felt better.

But nothing else in their experiences provokes and sustains a comparable authority of awareness; and Mr. Lewis' method prevents him from taking on, however ineptly, the rôle of author, guide, and judge himself. It might in fact be said that whatever is good in the book is good not because but in spite of Mr. Lewis' apparatus.

The sense of frustration, of deadlock and stalemate, that pervades the book derives at least as much from its method as from the desolation of its characters. The method is a betrayal of the science from which it springs and the art to which it aspires. The social scientist, humane and quietly self-righteous, having exhausted his interest in the manipulation of questionnaires and statistics, has stepped in to take over the job abandoned by the artist: David Riesman, as Mark Schorer has pointed out, replaces Sinclair Lewis, not altogether to our

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advantage, as the chronicler of bourgeois America; and Oscar Lewis confidently regards his method as in the natural course of events succeeding the method of, say, Dickens in the continuing obligation to amplify and dramatize the short and simple annals of the poor:

> In the nineteenth century, when the social sciences were still in their infancy, the job of recording the effects of the process of industrialization and urbanization was left to novelists, playwrights, journalists, and social reformers. Today, a similar process of culture change is going on among the peoples of the less-developed countries but we find no comparable outpouring of a universal literature which would help us to improve our understanding of the process and the people. And yet the need for such an understanding has never been more urgent, now that the less-developed countries have become a major force on the world scene. . . .
>
> This situation presents a unique opportunity to the social sciences and particularly to anthropology to step into the gap and develop a literature of its own.

And, concluding his Introduction, Mr. Lewis makes it explicit that his purpose is, ultimately, neither scientific nor literary, but ringingly political:

> It seems to me that the material in this book has important implications for our thinking and our policy in regard to the underdeveloped countries of the world and particularly Latin America. It highlights the social, economic, and psychological complexities which have to be faced in any effort to transform and eliminate the culture of poverty from the world. It suggests that basic changes in the attitudes and value systems of the poor must go hand in hand with improvements in the material conditions of living.

It is reasonable to understand Mr. Lewis as a decent, well-meaning man troubled by the newly terrifying facts of poverty, which he has observed at first hand. The politics of catastrophe—piecemeal or instantaneous—hangs over all our heads. The Sánchez family is a fact (whatever the shape of the fact) which is part of this new politics; we must learn as much as we can of both, as quickly as possible, though even so we may be helpless at a dead end of history; and Mr. Lewis's book is an infuriatingly pretentious, untrustworthy, misleading clue to the family and the politics. Nevertheless, as long as social scientists remain so insensitive to the nature of experience, so deaf to the medium of language, so editorially magnanimous in their political aims, and so unperturbed in the midst of all unmastered disciplines, we may yet decline to celebrate these self-proclaimed successors to the poets and novelists, who instructed us and gave us delight.

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COMMUNICATIONS

Dear Sirs,

Vernon Young's highly tendential flight of fancy about my book, *The Three Faces of the Film, HR* Summer 1961, implies airplane consumption with whole chapters lost in air pockets. However that may be, one would not guess from the result that movies are known to the world as among the most mechanically fortuitous and formally centerless objects that art products can be. Perhaps, as author of four books on film subjects during the last 17 years, I must plead to having taken undue advantage of the film art's notable frailties to exploit them as I chose, regardless of the Public Relations interest of the industry, high and low. What then? Mr. Young, as schoolman of the art and literary quarterlies, must know the permissiveness of modern critical usage and so should not sustain the same blank horror of my "patent eclecticism" as that manifested in less enlightened, more "committed" quarters. Or am I mistaken about the facial expression of his strictures? Is it that of a cocky young professor (I choose an analogy) who can't be taken in by rumors that there is an Intentional Fallacy and that, above all, one's favorites must be protected from its horrid insinuations?

I take only a quasi-Shakespearian attitude of irony toward even some mighty movie art: it is not, perhaps, only what it is cracked up to be. This being so, even of some mighty *non*-movie art, Mr. Young's do-or-die manoeuvre to quarantine me in a semantics of aesthetic criticism looks politically inspired. His charges of "perversity," my lack of "intellectual coherence," "integrity of vision," are so many clichés made to function as smoke-screens in critical warfare. Mr. Young must also know that my merger of psychoanalysis, myth, free plastic analogies, unconscious syndromes in the film industry and straight technical criticism, has already won recognition precisely for establishing new criteria of integrity and coherence. His strategy, apparently, lay in pretending this terrain is illusive, that my criticism has remained a "sport" till he elected to take account of it. Mr. Young finds himself fighting a sham war, I fear, a war which is real only as he aligns himself with that curious crew of professional film cultists who have outlawed my criticism on the statutory grounds that to admit it would be self-incriminating.

Placing me high in some respects, Mr. Young hopes to be rid of me once and for all. Then the field will be free for the academy which he also tries to exhibit at arm's length but which, it seems more than plain, he is clutching to a palpitating heart. Nothing could be "squarer" than his applied method of taking a director or a film at face (and more than face) value. It is only rival brands of film criticism he will not take at face value. From his remarks on my "vain"

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effort "to place [myself] at a humanist center," one would think he did not even know the dictionary meaning of the word, humanism, and had forgotten that readers of my book might know it. He tosses away my declared interest in the "classic human image" (one positive value I give all movies) as if my frequent application of depth psychology in reading filmic vision were, for some strange reason, antagonistic to that image. Could Mr. Young possibly think that reckonings of the "stream of consciousness" should be confined to heroes like King Kong? What is *non*-humanist, in short, about my continual preoccupation (I quote his quote) with "the unceasing life of mind and body"?

Some of Mr. Young's more specific challenges are fatal to his precipitately wrapped-up case against me. He is ignorant of the documentation behind my Garbo-Barrymore-Valentino thesis and flaunts his ignorance. His touch upon a minor point in my *Miracle in Milan* thesis flagrantly twists my whole argument out of recognition; I ask readers to compare the facts with their representation by Mr. Young. My critic's final "defy" on my *Rashomon* essay would do credit to a raw political candidate's last-minute fling at the opposition. Like such a fling, it alleges dishonest motives in a framework which is the sole evidence of their dishonesty.

PARKER TYLER

New York City

Dear Sirs,

I ought to be grateful for Mr. Tyler's letter since it is still further evidence of the techniques I have already found either perplexing or objectionable in his criticism: the terminology intended to overwhelm, the spiteful attributions to his critics of allegiances or associations they clearly don't own to, the implication that since he has published four books on the subject his prestige is beyond question (at least by me). I deplore the anxiety that dictates to Mr. Tyler the foolish supposition that I am a "schoolman," that I represent in any way an "academy" toward which I have an ambivalent attitude: there is paranoia in his necessity for so placing me. I could wish I felt the assurance which such an alliance and such support would no doubt provide, but I must confess that my flights of fancy, my cultism, my ignorance of language, my political tenor, and whatever else I've missed in Mr. Tyler's reading of me, have not the sanction of an institution nor the authority of an association. These are errors bred by intransigence and solitude. . . . "Mr. Young hopes to be rid of me once and for all." What shocking masochism! But what respect for my effort. Had I the desire, I should yet have no such hope. . . .

VERNON YOUNG

Stockholm, Sweden

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